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THE SHORTY KIDS;

OR,

Three Chips of Three Old Blocks.

BY PETER PAD.



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THE SHORTY KIDS;

OR,

THREE CHIPS OF THREE OLD BLOCKS.

By PETER PAD,

Author of "The Shortys Out Fishing," "Sam," "The Funny Four," "Joe Junk the Whaler," "Bob Rollick, the Yankee Notion Drummer," "The Shortys Married and Settled Down," "Bob Rollick; or, What Was he Born For?" "Ebenezer Crow," "Stump; or, Little, but Oh, My!" "Chips and Chin-Chin," "Stuttering Sam," "Tommy Bounce," "Tom, Dick, and the ___," "Shorty; or, Kicked Into Good Luck," "Shorty in Search of His Dad," "Tommy Dodd," "The Shortys' Trip Around the World," "Tumbling Tim," "Boar-Boarding-School," "The Shortys Out for Fun," "The Shortys Out Gunning," "The Shortys Farming," "Behind the Scenes; or, Out With a New York Combination," "Sam Spry, the New York Drummer," "The Shortys' Country Store," "Joseph Jump and His Old Blind Nag," "Jack Hawser's Tavern," etc., etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

For the benefit of those who have not made the acquaintance of the renowned Shorty family in THE BOYS OF NEW YORK allow me to say:

The original Shorty was a foundling, who, after many childish adventures and escapades, finally drifted into negro minstrelsy, and became an expert performer on the banjo, and, because of his size, made both reputation and fortune in what are known as "monkey parts."

In good time he became the father of a boy who never grew to even his own size; a veritable "chip," however, and who has been known ever since he joined his father in the showbusiness as the Kid.

After making a fortune Shorty took it into his head to make a search for his dad, never having seen or heard of him, but yet believing that he had one somewhere, and at the end of a great many comical adventures in various States of the Union, he finally found him in California, rich, but something of a recluse.

The family thus became united, and throughout many subsequent adventures this father and grandfather (Mr. Josiah Burwick) has been known as the Old Man.

Finally, after a trip around the world and enjoying everything that money could buy, or jolly natures appreciate, Shorty married a widow with two daughters, one of whom his son, the Kid, subsequently married, while the Old Man eventually married the other, thus bringing about a queer state of relationship which was yet further mixed up by the birth of a son to each one of the fathers.

It is with these sons (now about eight years of age) that we have to deal.

Well, the Shorty Kids come to the front, and possibly they need a sketchy introduction to the reader, although those who have read "The Shortys Farming," or "The Shortys' Country Store," have a very good idea of these three chips of those three old blocks.

They were born very nearly at the same time, about eight years before the opening of this story, looked very much alike, and were, in fact, so much alike, and so full of deviltry at the same time, that the three old blocks were in danger of having their hair brought down with sorrow to the morgue.

And as for the three mothers, they were in sorrow the greater portion of the time on account of them; and because of this they turned on the respective fathers of these kids, and made it circus-like for them, insisting upon it that they were just like them, and that the thermometer was exceedingly low the day they were fools enough to consent to marry such a family.

Of course they loved their boys, and each mother thought hers the best and only truly

good one of the three; and it will be readily seen that this occasioned many a row, not only between the mothers, but also between their respective dads.

And this brings us to the threshold of "The Shorty Kids"—three as bright and mischievous youngsters as ever earned a spanking.

George Burwick, or Shorty, had named his boy Peter Pad, as a compliment to me, although I begin to think it rather a questionable compliment, and Charley, the Kid, had gone to the other extreme and named his boy "Ed," in compliment to the literary eel who has maligned me in THE BOYS OF NEW YORK, while Josiah Burwick, the Old Man, named his California, intending, probably, to honor the State where he made his money, and where he was found by Shorty and the Kid at the end of that celebrated chase—"Shorty in Search of His Dad."

But they were called respectively "Pete," "Ed" and "Cal," and as such we shall know them in the coming pages.

Bright, sturdy boys they were, spending about half of the year at the Shorty homestead on Long Island, where their parents first had their experiences in farming, and the wild, free life and out-of-door exercise developed their muscle to the fullest, and their spirit as well.

During the past two years they had attended school, but in spite of all their teachers could do they learned more mischief than anything else, and finally all three of them were put to a private school, simply because they would not tolerate them in a public one.

"It's all the fault of your boy Cal," said Shorty, one day, soon after this change in their educational training, when the three dads were growling about their mischievous "chips."

To tell the truth, however, Cal was the best boy of the three, and because he was so the other two put upon him and set up jobs on him. Truly, that best boy of the three got more weltings than both the others.

"No, sir, nothing of the sort," retorted the Old Man, indignantly, although he did not know how much better his boy was than the others.

"Dead wrong, pop," put in the Kid.

"What?"

"Dat Cal's a bad one. He gets Pete an' Ed inter all sorts of scrapes."

"No, sir; I know better. He's no worse than the other two are, if as bad," retorted the Old Man, red with anger.

"Dad, you make me tired," said Shorty.

"Yer make me weary, pop," said the Kid, following up the chaffing.

"Bah! I say your kids are just like you—just as full of mischief as ever you two were, and that's enough to break up any well-regulated family in the world."

"Oh, dad, speak gently; whisper what thou feelest, as the poetical gusher says," said Shorty.

"Yes, pop, draw it mild," added the Kid.

"Oh, shut up! I dare say that both of you fellows do all you can to help the young rascals on. In fact, I have often caught you at it, especially in the country. Don't talk to me about my boy being the worst."

"Why, soy, pop, he's tryin' ter get my kid ter bust his bank same's he has ter get der pennies ter buy boxin' gloves," protested the Kid.

"What!" roared the Old Man, leaping to his feet and glaring at him.

"Fact, dad. Tried it on Pete; but he's a good little boy and wouldn't have it," said Shorty, helping the thing along.

"If I believed you, I'd kill him. But I don't," said old Mr. Burwick.

Then Shorty and the Kid gave him the full moon laugh, and he bounced out of the room, puffed up with happiness.

Such scenes had not become infrequent of late because of these three mischievous kids, nor had they, as before hinted, been confined to the three fathers, because the three mothers got them by the ears quite as often, while it was found almost impossible to keep a servant in the family, nobody but old Ginger having the patience to stay.

Do you remember Ginger, boys? He was a very funny coon.

Yes, those three mothers (mother and daughters originally, but goodness knows their relationship since marrying that Shorty family) had frequent spats because of those kids, each one, like the fathers, believing her own to be the best.

Indeed, to such a pass had this thing come of late that there was serious talk of separating and each family going by itself, instead of living together in luxurious commune, as they had ever since they had married and settled down.

And this is the condition of affairs as my story in its new phase opens on "The Shorty Kids," and I trust the old readers and friends of Shorty understand it.

The Old Man felt sore over what his son and grandson had said regarding "Cal," and after getting over his mad somewhat he began to ask himself regarding the truth of it.

He also asked his hopeful kid.

"Come here, California. Have you been a good boy to-day?" he asked.

"Yes, papa, first-rate," replied the urchin, looking as honest as a calf.

"Been with your bad cousins?"

"No, papa."

"Well, what have you been doing?"

"Studying my lessons, papa."

The Old Man looked severely at him, thinking him almost too good to be going around without

wings, but the kid was "fly," even without wings.

"Do your cousins ever attempt to get you to indulge in boxing?"

"No, papa."

How did that little short-haired angel know the meaning of "boxing?" the good Old Man asked himself, and yet he looked so honest that it broke him all up.

"Well, see that you don't learn any of their naughty capers, for if I catch you at any of them I shall dust the seat of your trousers so severely that you will find it difficult to retain anything but a perpendicular position. Now go, and study your lessons some more."

"Yes, papa," and he vanished.

The Old Man couldn't bear to hear him say yes and no, "papa," but his mother insisted upon it, and Cal seemed to take particular delight in sounding the "papa" as flat and babyish as possible, and this made him madder than anything else.

He wanted to believe his boy the best, but he had seen so much of him that he could not make up his mind that he had grown suddenly and altogether good, so he resolved to have an eye on him, and bring him promptly to the "bull ring" if he caught him crooked.

Shorty and the Kid knew all this, and were happy over it because they knew it worried the Old Man.

True, they often brought their own wives about their ears by their tacit encouragement of the kids' mischief, and more than once each of the mothers had spanked the wrong kid in their excitement attending some of their rackets suddenly discovered.

And the older they grew the more it looked as though the family would have to separate into its three original sections and live as far apart as possible.

Nor did all the trouble come upon the Old Man and the three mothers, for those kids had got old enough to put up jobs on their dads, and in many ways to make life as much of a burden for both Shorty and the Kid as they had made it for others nearly all their lives.

And yet they couldn't resist the temptation to encourage such apt pupils as they found all three of the kids to be in all the various sorts of devilry which they themselves seemed to have inherited, and that was what the matter continually was in the Shorty homestead.

In one of the wrangles between the three fathers the Kid intimated that the Old Man's son was the worst of the trio, and that he was even encouraging the other two in the art of boxing.

This riled the Old Man, and although his young hopeful denied all knowledge of such a thing—such a wicked thing—he resolved to satisfy himself regarding it before he proceeded to extremes.

But it so happened that both Shorty and the Kid were secretly encouraging the little fellows in the art of boxing. Indeed, they had bought them ring costumes, together with gloves, and all three of them soon reached quite a state of perfection in the "manly" art of self-defense.

And to make these entertainments still more realistic, they contrived a miniature ring on the top of a big round table, boring holes for the posts on the outside edge, around which they stretched a silken cord.

It was a trifle too high for safety, but it made a perfect ring for the little fellows to disport themselves in, and both Shorty and the Kid could stand in chairs and direct their movements.

This thing had been going on for some time before the Kid told the Old Man about his hopeful's fistic inclinations, and there was where they had the laugh on the old bald-headed progenitor of the Shortys.

But one day not long afterward, as the old gentleman was walking past the dining-room door, he heard Shorty and the Kid giving such orders as led him to believe that the fistic art was being directed and encouraged by them.

"Oh, ho! I am on to their game," said he, listening attentively outside. "Those rascally sons of mine are encouraging the children in pugilism, are they?"

Then he opened the door partially and inserted his hairless, frowning mug far enough inside to satisfy himself that his son Cal was one of the nobby little boxers whom Shorty and the Kid were instructing and encouraging.

It was indeed a novel sight, but not a pleasant one for the Old Man, who involuntarily spat in the palm of his hand and thought of what he would do when he got a chance to cover his son's person with it.

But having caught the little rascal in the act, as he supposed, after his denial of all such wickedness, put the idea in his head to swoop upon him after the business was all over and show him that he could see through walls and doors.

Now, the truth of the matter was, Cal was not

one of the pugilists on this particular occasion. Pete and Ed were taking their lessons, while he was in the back yard, experimenting with two cats, tied by the tail, to ascertain which of them could pull the most.

But after Ginger had put a stop to his sport (and got a rotten apple in the eye for his pains), Cal sauntered up-stairs, where his angry dad was pacing the floor, angrily impatient, waiting for him.

Cal bounded into the room, and the Old Man bounded for him. He seized him by the seat of his knickerbockers, and placed him face downward across his knees, where he proceeded to fan him with the palm of his hand.

But the little fellow bore it like a major, though he supposed all the while that he was being flattened out for what he had so lately been up to in the back yard.

"You will, will you?" the Old Man asked, pausing to get his second wind.

"No, papa, no!" protested the Kid.

"Don't you dare to 'papa' me, or I will feed the rats with you. Whew! and if I ever catch you—"

He was saying this, and doing his best to assist his offspring to get along without the assistance of artificial heat, when the door opened, and in rushed his wife.

"Stop!" she screamed. "What are you doing, Josiah Burwick?"

"Trying to maul some sense and obedience into this kid of yours," he answered, savagely, giving the boy another slap.

No, not that exactly, but he was just on the point of doing so, when the indignant wife and mother caught his hand in one of hers, and he caught the other one plumb on the nose.

The Old Man dropped that kid, and the youngster lost no time in skipping the room, all the while thinking he had been whaled for his cat racket in the back yard, and vowing vengeance on Ginger.

"Josiah Burwick, are you a brute, or have you gone crazy?" demanded the wife.

"Mrs. Burwick, I might ask you the same question. Why did you strike me—me, your lawful husband?"

"Why did you beat my child?"

"Because he lied to me."

"In what way?"

"He told me that he never joined with Peter and Ed in their bad sports, especially in learning to box, and I just caught him at it down on the dining-room table," replied the Old Man, angrily.

"Now, Josiah Burwick, I am convinced that you are either an unfeeling brute or that you have gone crazy," said she.

"What do you mean, madam?"

"Why, little California has been at play in the back yard with our cat and another one for the past two hours."

"Impossible!" blurted the Old Man, and his eyes began to protrude.

"Ask Ginger. Josiah Burwick, you are an old fool—a bald-headed fool—and if you strike that dear boy again, I will—I—yah!" and she ended it with a wild screech as she rushed from the room.

That was pleasant for the Old Man.

He glared at the door she had slammed a moment, and then he sat down and wondered if he was really and truly a fool—a bald-headed fool.

"Oh, Angie, Angie, you have broken my heart!" he moaned, and then he felt of his snoot, "and but for the color and toughness of my nose, you would have broken that," he added. "But was I really mistaken? Ah! I'll see Ginger before I commence proceedings for a divorce on the ground of cruel and inhuman treatment," and down-stairs he rushed to find the soon, just in time to see Pete and Ed coming out of the dining-room, dressed as usual, and looking as innocent as two white rabbits.

But he wouldn't believe them under any consideration, so he paid no attention to their good-natured, boyish salutations, and kept on in search of Ginger.

He found him in the kitchen.

"Here, Ginger, was Cal playing in the back yard this afternoon?" he demanded.

"Yes, sah."

"All alone?"

"All 'lone!" and Ginger rolled his eyes. "Lucky fo' de cats dat dar warn't no mo' den he. He make it drefful libely fo' us down heah dis yer afternoon. He catch Mr. Bugle's cat an' he tie her tail to our cat, an' dey fight an' jump fru de kitchen winder an' break 'bout ten dollars wuf ob dishes, an' den when I stop his fun an' try to drike him up-stairs, he hit me in de eye wid a rotten apple. Oh, he's a—"

"That's all right, Ginger. I have just given him a sound spanking for it," said the Old Man, going from the room, concluding that if he had

made a mistake regarding the boxing, the boy had got no more than he deserved on account of his other "kadidos."

But he had to settle with his wife yet. Of course he no longer meditated a divorce, but he had got to come to terms somehow, and in what way could he do it without admitting that he was an old bald-headed fool?

"Confound Shorty and the Kid," said he. "They are forever doing something to get me into trouble. Things were bad enough, Heaven knows, before these youngsters began to grow up; now they are a confounded sight worse."

Meantime, Cal had met Pete and Ed and told them all about the fun he had had with the cats, supplementing it with an account of how his dad tried to flatten him out as he lay across his knee.

"Serves you right," said Pete. "Why didn't you come in and have some fun boxing with Ed and I?"

"Oh, there's more fun in cats," replied Cal.

"Oh, there is, eh? And getting yourself belted to pay for it. We've had a bushel of fun, and didn't have to get licked for it, nuther; did we, Ed?"

"Noap," replied Ed, but his face looked as though it had been near enough to a red-hot stove to be half cooked.

"Didn't we have fun?"

"Yop."

"You look it," laughed Cal. "But, I say, snoozers, I'm going to have some fun with my dad," he added.

"What for?"

"Because he's having it all now."

"He is?"

"Yes—with me."

"What are yer goin' ter do?" asked Ed.

"Never you mind. He can't spank me just for playing with cats," said he, doubling up his fists and shaking his head.

Then Ed and Pete went off by themselves and arranged to find out what Cal was going to do, so they could frustrate the job he intended to put up, or turn it on himself.

That was a way they had of having fun with each other.

But sometimes one of them proved a little smarter than the others, and it was just as likely to be Cal as any one of the others—even a little more likely.

Finally the Old Man's hopeful settled on what he would do to make his paternal progenitor weary of life, and then he communicated it to Pete and Ed.

But he knew these relatives of his well enough to feel certain that they would give him away if they got a chance, so he arranged the snap to embrace one or both of them.

Now this was the job that this young genius had arranged for his dad's benefit, and Ed agreed to help him, while Peter assumed the responsibility of giving away the Old Man, and both together they would enjoy the sport of seeing Cal jumped on.

He was to arrange a pail full of water over the inside of the bath-room door, so that it could be upset with a string whenever the right person happened to enter the place.

Pete and Ed assisted Cal to fix it up, and Ed agreed to pull the string, which was to be taken across the hall into another room, through the fanlights of the two doors, whenever Cal gave the signal, for he thought it would be awfully funny in having a hand in dousing the Old Man, besides the sport of seeing Cal caught and whaled for it.

Now, this wasn't a house divided against itself exactly, but each of those kids was in for getting the best of the other, or anybody else, for that matter, and so Pete concluded that he wouldn't say anything about it to the Old Man and see how the old thing would work.

As for Cal, he had it in for Ed on account of a racket he had worked on him a few days before, so, instead of carrying out his part of the job on his father, he resolved to post him against his danger, and put the blame on Ed.

So he went and told Ginger how Ed had put up a job on the head of the house, and for him to go at once and put him on his guard, and catch the culprit in the dark room with the string in hand, ready to upset the pail as soon as he should enter the bath-room.

And here is where Ginger gets in his work.

It must be borne in mind that Ginger had it in for every one of those kids, and Cal especially, for they were continually playing tricks of some kind on him.

So he concluded that this was a good opportunity for him to get hunk with Cal, whom he believed to be really the guilty party and the one to pull the string. He wasn't sure about it, for he was never very certain about anything, but he felt sure that one, if not all, of those household torments would get "warmed."

With this end in view he proceeded to inform the Old Man of the job that Cal had put up on him, and that he could find him in the room opposite the bath-room with the string.

"Oh, the young rascal! he would give me a ducking, would he?" said the Old Man, with a wicked gleam of triumph overspreading his fat, red mug.

"You catch him up dar, shuah. He's a bad boy —wuss nor Shorty nor de Kid eber wur."

"Oh, I'll just make him tired of his young life. I'll make him wish he had been born a sand-worm," muttered the irate dad, as he reached for a trunk strap. "Play tricks on his parental dad, will he? We'll see about that," and he started for the room, leaving Ginger standing in the hallway wearing a grin as big as an old gum shoe.

A glance upward showed the Old Man the string running through the fanlights from the bath-room, and setting his teeth firmly together, and knowing his wife was away from home just then, he opened the door.

There stood Ed, paralyzed with surprise at the unexpected turn in affairs from the way they were expected to work.

The Old Man's blood was up, and he waited to waste no words, but just snatched that youngster's body.

He belabored him soundly with the strap, thinking all the while that it was his own flesh and blood he was trying to make tender.

Ed was gritty as a rule, but this took him so completely by surprise that it shook the "sand" all out of him, and he bellowed like a stuck pig.

"Oh, you will put up jobs on me, will you?"

"Yar—yar! Stop it!" cried Ed.

"Stop it, will I?" and he basted him some more.

"Stop it! Yer got no right ter lick me!"

"Oh, I haven't, hey? We'll see about that, you mischievous rascal!" and once more he lubricated him with "strap-oil," after which he went out, locking the door after him, and leaving Ed there in the dark room alone with his misery.

Pete and Cal had skipped ere that, you can safely bet, and as for Ginger, he was happy to think either one of the torments had got a strapping, so he went down to the kitchen again, happy enough to eat pie.

The Old Man was puffing from the labor he had just been bestowing on Ed, when he met that youngster's mother.

"Have you seen my Ed?" she asked.

"No, but I have just seen my Cal," said he, savagely. "Come and see the job he had put up for my benefit."

She followed him, and there, sure enough, was the pail of water all ready to tip over.

"He is a dreadfully mischievous boy, pop," said she, hardly able to conceal a smile.

"He is! Why, they are all just alike. Yours is just as full of the old cat as either of them. But if you would only larrup him as I have just been giving it to mine there wouldn't be so much deviltry going on," said he, holding up the strap.

"Have you been whipping him?" she asked.

"You may bet I have, and I'll bet that he won't forget it right away, either."

"You had ought to be ashamed of yourself to beat that boy with a strap, and I know you wouldn't have dared to do it if Angie had been at home."

"Mamma!" came from the darkened room, and both she and the Old Man started.

"Mamma, let me out!"

"What does that mean? What are you doing in there?"

"The Old Man locked me in here."

That same Old Man was a picture to behold as he struggled with his doubts and fears. Had he whaled the wrong boy?

"Open that door!" said the Kid's wife, turning indignantly upon him.

Without a word he proceeded to do so, and, sure enough, out came little Ed, sore, crying and limping.

"What is the matter?"

"He whaled me an' locked me up."

"So, Josiah Burwick, this is the boy you have been flogging, is it?" she demanded.

"I—I—"

"You are a brute, sir, a bald-headed old brute, sir, and I will have you arrested for this as true as you live," she said, indignantly, walking away, followed by her boy.

She was a spunky little woman, and the old man was sure he saw blood in her eye, and it worried him.

He stood there like one dazed.

He had learned that he had whipped his own boy for nothing, and now he had put his foot in it even more seriously.

What in thunder should he do?

Where was his own kid, how had the mistake occurred?

His son and grandson were up-stairs in the

billiard-room, and thither he went for consolation, not daring to go anywhere else, for fear of meeting the indignant mother or his own wife, who would be quite as mad at the thought of what was intended for her child.

Shorty and the Kid were playing billiards, that being a great pastime with them.

"Know where Cal and Pete are?" he asked.

"Oh, studyin' their lessons, no doubt," said Shorty, as he executed a fancy shot.

"Studying deviltry, more like, confound them. Those boys will be the death of me."

"What's the matter now?"

"Oh, they attempted to play a trick on me, and I strapped the wrong boy."

"Whose?" asked the Kid.

"Yours."

"Oh, you did, hey?"

"Yes; thought he was Cal."

"Well, you had better look sharp that der ole gal don't find it out."

"Confound it! She has found it out, and she swears she'll have me arrested."

"All right—then she'll do it, pop, an' don't toddle with any other idea," said he, soberly.

"Do you think so?" he asked, alarmed.

"Bet yer life on it, pop. She's red hot when anybody strikes her kid. She won't let me do it, an' if she murmured that she'd give yer der legal collar, she'll do it," said he, winking to Shorty.

"Nice family muss you have kicked up. Why don't you let the kids alone?" asked Shorty.

"Confound them, they attempted to play tricks on me, and I thought I was belting Cal for his part of it."

"She'll 'rest yer, sure's guns."

"Yes. Best thing you can do is ter skip out, and let us try to pacify her."

"Do you think so?"

"Cert. Want a cop comin' here an' drag you out, an' disgrace us all?"

"Oh, lord—oh, lord, what trouble is always coming out for me," he moaned.

"Yer an old crank, that's what's der matter. Leave der kids alone."

"But they will not leave me alone."

"Well, the best thing you can do is to skip the gutter, and see if the kid an' I can smooth things over. Go at once, an' I'll fix it with Angie."

"But—"

"But what?"

"Do you really think she would have me arrested?" he asked.

"Dead sure. Bet she's after a warrant before this," replied the Kid.

"Dust, dad—dust. Go to a hotel and wait till the clouds roll by. Wouldn't have a cop come here for ten thousand cases."

"Oh, lord—oh, lord!" he groaned, and went slowly down to his room, resolved on following Shorty's advice.

Shorty and the Kid shook hands as soon as he went out.

"How?"

"Red hot."

"Well, say, let's keep it up. It will serve der old crank right—eh?"

"Mum! We'll make him tired. Look as solemn as a sick hen, an' we'll play out ther snap for all that's in it."

"Hush! I'll go down an' see Caddy an' you bounce him along ter seek cover," said the Kid, as they both went down-stairs.

Remember, theirs was a big mansion, with one family on each floor, but the kitchen and dining-room in common.

Shorty rushed into the Old Man's apartments. He was hastily dressing himself.

"Where's Angie?" he asked.

"Out shopping, I suppose."

"Well, you want to fan yourself out of this on the sly and double quick."

"How so?"

"Caddy has gone for a warrant."

"You don't say so, George!" breathed the Old Man.

"But I do, though. Wouldn't have you arrested for anything in the world. Get into yer duds, quick. Here, jam some shirts and collars inter this gripsack. There you are. Now go out of the back way and skip for ther Fifth Avenue. Lay low an' I'll try an' fix it up. Skip!"

"Oh, George, this is dreadful. And she my daughter-in-law!" he moaned.

"No more'n she is your sister-in-law. Dust!"

"Oh, lord, but this is dreadful!" he heard him whine as he went from the room, leaving the laughing, fun-loving Shorty to develop the racket after his own fashion.

to have him arrested for strapping her boy, although he had done so by mistake.

There was no doubt about it but that she was very mad, but when she learned all the particulars relating to the affair, and about the Old Man's skipping for cover for fear of arrest, she relaxed and finally had to laugh over it, as did the kid Ed.

The Old Man's wife was also indignant when she learned about the wailing Ed got that was intended for Cal, but when she saw how jolly the others were over the matter, she also relented and joined with them in helping puflish her bald better-half.

Of course it was soft-shell almonds to Shorty and the Kid, and it was also nothing new for them to have the Old Man on a string, as the reader knows.

But it was comical to see how the boys took it, the little rascals! They were not long in getting at the bottom of the whole business, and they were bright enough to see how laughable it was, and all three of them stood on their heads in order to give expression to their feelings, young California the most delighted one of the three.

But to follow up the Old Man.

Oh, how sick and ashamed he was as he went to the hotel and registered his name as a transient guest. He fancied that the clerk, the porters, and everybody about the place knew him. And they did know him—for he once lived there, but of course they did not understand why he was there then, and never asked him.

All this, as before said, was just old peaches and cream for Shorty and the Kid, and later on they went to the hotel to see how the Old Man was getting on.

They found him miserable.

They found him unhappy because he had not gone to some other hotel and registered under another name.

"How is it?" was his first eager question, as they entered his chamber.

"Soy, Caddy's wild," said the Kid.

"Oh, Lord!" he groaned.

"And so is Angie," added Shorty.

"What for?"

"Because you intended to strap her boy."

"Her boy? Confound it, haven't I any interest in that kid? Haven't I a right to larrup him if I want to?" he demanded.

"Oh, yes, if you want to take the consequences," said Shorty, coldly.

"Aren't I his father?"

"Well, it looks like it, but you've no business to be an old crank if you are a joint owner of the kid."

"Oh, pshaw! Well, what do they say?"

"They are all dancing a scalp-dance, and two big policemen are waiting for you ter come home."

"You don't say so?"

"But I do, all the same."

"She's got a warrant for yer, pop."

"Aren't that a nice snap?" growled Shorty.

"But I—"

"Come off! Settle down to business. You admit that you are a crank?"

"How I" demanded the Old Man, at the same time opening his eyes very wide.

"Why, don't yer know?" asked the Kid.

"No, I do not."

"Oh, yer way off!"

"Tell me why I am."

"Can't yer keep yer old nut level? What's der matter wid der kids?"

"They are perfect little fiends, that's what the matter is with them," replied the Old Man.

"Bah!"

"Bum!" came from Shorty and the Kid.

"I've heard you two duffers say the same thing," persisted the Old Man.

"Oh, yer no good."

"What?"

"As a family man—"

"As a father—"

"N. G. No good."

"But I tell you—you don't know how to bring up a child," he protested again.

"How was I brought up?" asked Shorty.

"An' me, too?" added the Kid.

"Oh, you duffers come up," said he.

"All right. Let der kids come up."

"But think of it! What will they be?" demanded the Old Man.

"Shortys, always!"

"Well, that is pretty bad. But, say, what shall I do?" he asked.

"Lay very low," said Shorty.

"Yes."

"Keep very mum," added the Kid.

"Yes, but—"

"Don't say a word! Put a muzzle on yer gab machine!"

"But—"

keep quiet, and we'll do all we can to fix things for yer."

"But, I say, my sons, it does not seem exactly right—hardly natural."

"How?"

"That—that—"

"Come off! You put yer big foot in it. You licked the wrong kid—"

"Well, but—"

"We can't help it, and so you must take the consequences."

"All ther time, pop."

"But suppose I write her a letter?"

"No good."

"Of course not. Besides, it would give you clean away, and the cops would swoop down on you here. No, we can't afford it, dad."

The Old Man sighed.

"Oh, hush!" and without further words they left their old-time victim to his reflections and skipped out.

Left alone, he was sad some more.

Again did he wish he was dead.

Indeed, at one time he was on the point of ringing for the fool-killer of the hotel, so firmly convinced was he that he needed him.

But he finally compromised with himself and ordered some refreshments, and the result was soothing enough to put him to sleep in the course of two or three hours, which was much more than he expected.

Shorty and the Kid returned to the family and reported the situation, larded with many a hearty laugh by all hands.

But it was rather hard work for Angie to laugh as heartily as the others did, for it was her husband who

"Stop! Where in thunder are you going?" the Old Man fairly yelled.

The jokers halted, turned with well-assumed looks of alarm to gaze at their irate dad again, then looking at each other as before, they each tapped their foreheads in suggestive pantomime, indicating that the old fellow was off his nut, and started again to retreat.

"Stop, confound you! Where are you going, and what the blazes do you mean? What is the matter with you, anyway?" Both Shorty and the Kid shook their heads. "Why in thunder don't you tell me something?"

"Too sad!" sighed the Kid.

"What?"

"Alas! too, too sad!" said Shorty.

"Explain, confound you!" he roared.

"Too sad!"



He fell upon his knees as if to supplicate. "I am the friend of your husband; as good an one as he has in the world. Will you not restore him to your favor once more?"

He almost cried.

And wished he had died.

Numerous years ago.

"And you are going to leave me?" he asked, pathetically.

"Got to do it, dad. But what you want to look out for is yer grip."

"How so?"

"Don't lose what you've got hold on. Keep that bald-headed receptacle of brain matter as nearly horizontal as possible, and we will see you again to-morrow," said Shorty, as though dead in earnest.

"But—"

"But what? We're giving it to you straight. The cops are waiting to give you the collar-and-elbow, and we can't stand any such disgrace. See?"

"Oh, Lord, oh, Lord!" he groaned.

"Now tumble in and sleep just as well as your broken-up old conscience will let you. We'll do our best to fix things for you. But it's tough," he added.

"What is tough?" the Old Man demanded.

"Why, that the whole family should be broken up and disgraced by the oldest member of it. It's a terrible disgrace, dad."

"Breaks my part of der household all up!" sighed the Kid.

"But don't you understand?"

"Oh, hush!"

"Don't you see—"

"Oh, we see too much. Now go to bed and see if you can't wake up level-headed in the morning. Come, Kiddy."

"But—"

was suffering from the snap, and she felt like taking his part in spite of what he had done, all the while knowing from experience what a pair of torments Shorty and the Kid were.

And yet she knew that he was well bestowed in a first-class hotel, and that all he could possibly suffer would be mentally. So she allowed the caper to go on, feeling all the while certain that he would never again raise his hand or a strap against their son.

The night passed.

Sad for the old man.

Somewhat more lively for others.

But when he woke and found himself in a strange room, no wife, no domestic arrangements, no son to make it lively for him in the morning when it was time for him to get up—nothing like home—oh, he was more broken up than ever.

But there was nothing the matter with Shorty and the Kid.

There was also nothing the matter with the other kids, only the wonder was why the Old Man didn't show up at the breakfast table as he had always done since they could remember.

About noon the next day his tormentors again visited him, after he had fretted himself into madness at their seeming neglect of him.

"Why have you stayed away from me so long, confound you?" was the way he spoke to them when they entered his room.

Both Shorty and the Kid started, looked at the Old Man seriously, then shaking hands solemnly, they turned to the door as if to retrace their steps without speaking.

"Alas! too, too sad!"

"By the historical, cream-colored Moses, what do you mean?" he roared again.

"It's no go, dad," said Shorty.

"No go," added the Kid, and a pair of owls never looked more sober than they did.

"What is no go?"

"She won't have it."

"No, she won't."

"What?"

"Won't forgive you, dad."

"Is that so?" he demanded, anxiously.

Both of the jokers sighed.

"But Angie—my wife?"

They sighed again.

"What?"

"Talking about a divorce."

"Go away!"

They sighed again.

"I believe you fellows are fooling me. What is the word from home? Have you succeeded in fixing things?"

"Well, dad, we've tried to, but it's a hard job. And yet Caddy has sent the officers home for the present," said Shorty.

"Oh, she has, eh?" he asked, anxiously.

"Yes—and I think we have worked, or put up a snap for you to work, that will bring things around all right again."

"Oh, tell me what it is, George!"

"We told them that you might be driven to making a cadava of yourself."

"What?"

"Committing suicide. That rather worries them, and if you will only follow instructions I guess the thing will work out all right."

"Cert," added the Kid.

"And what is it? Tell me quickly."

"We'll pretend we don't know where you are—that you have dusted, and perhaps will be found in the river. Now here is your part of the snap, and if you work it right all may be lovely again."

"Cert. Yer can run der goose up on der peak hal-yards again if yer only got der sand in yer," added the Kid.

"Well, how?" he demanded, anxiously.

"Prick up yer hearers. Do just as I'm telling yer, and yer'll be a winner; work it right, and we'll cap yer game. Get into some sort of disguise, so yer won't be known."

"Oh, black up, dat's der best," said the Kid.

"Yes, make yerself up like some respectable old smoke, and go to ther house. Say yer know where Josiah Burwick is, an' will stand him up before ther family if they'll agree ter say no more about ther row. They'll do it gladly, then yer can skip out, wash up, and show up again as ther original, ther one and only Josiah. See?"

"Good! I'll do it, boys. You be there so as to help me out, will you?" he asked, seizing Shorty's hand.

"Cert."

"Go it, pop, an' we'll cap der game!"

"All right. I'll fix it. I'll go down to Ed Harrigan's and borrow a make-up of the property-man, hire a cab, and be at the house inside of an hour."

"Good enough!"

"Let her go."

"But mind you don't overdo it. You know you don't draw much water, and so don't crowd on too much sail," said Shorty.

"All right."

"Jam yer centerboard way down, pop."

"Depend upon me; I'll work it right," and shaking hands with them with much earnestness, they parted on the hotel steps.

Then Shorty and the Kid shook hands all alone by themselves.

The runty rascals always shake when they think they have something on the Old Man.

They went home and gave the whole thing away to the folks, and they, so long as it was only a joke and no real harm would come to the head of the Shorty family, were agreeable to carrying out their part of the snap.

And those kids seemed to know that there was something up, or going to be, and they were on pins and needles until they could catch on.

But let us return to the Old Man.

The idea struck him as being a first-class one, and he hastened to carry it out.

He drove to Harrigan's theater in a cab.

"What is the racket, pop?" asked the property-man, when he made his wishes known.

"Mum, Billy. I am going to work a detective caper," replied the Old Man, who was well acquainted with "Props."

"What! you a detective?"

"For this occasion only, dear boy. But mum, you know; keep it locked in the deepest internal make-up of your anatomy."

"All right, Mr. Burwick. I'll do anything for you and the boys. By the way, how are they nowadays?"

"Oh, first rate," replied the Old Man, as he proceeded with his make-up.

They chatted away, but in a short time the Old Man transformed himself in a most artistic manner into a gray-haired old negro, after which he got into the cab again and set out for home.

Shorty had arranged it so that the whole family, kids and all—yes, and even Ginger, were on hand.

The Old Man looked like quite a respectable old colored gentleman as he got out of his carriage and walked up the stoop.

Shorty answered the bell instead of letting Ginger do so.

"Great!" he whispered, and then bade him follow into the parlor.

"This colored gentleman says he is a friend of dad; that he wants to see Mrs. Charles Burwick in his behalf. This is she," said Shorty, pointing to the Kid's wife.

"Where is he?" she asked.

"Yes—oh, yes! where is he?" put in Angie.

"He admits that he has done wrong, but will return if all is forgiven," said the Old Man, "in deep disguise."

"We can never forgive him."

"We!"

"Neither myself or his wife. Neither can that dear boy whom he abused—can you, Ed?" she asked, addressing him.

"Nixy. I'd like ter put a head on him," replied the little rascal.

"We'll all put a head on him," added his own son California.

"You bet!" put in Peter Pad Burwick.

The Old Man felt sick, but at the same time his palm itched to argue with that hopeful son of his. How he did want to dust the seat of his trousers, but he had more important business on hand just then.

"And so you will not forgive him?" he asked, again addressing the ladies.

"No, never!" they all replied, in chorus.

"But he might destroy himself."

"Well, let him."

"Yes, let him jump off ther dock," said his hopeful California.

"And I don't believe you are any friend of his, either!" said the Kid's wife.

"Oh, yes, I am, I—" and he fell upon his knees as if to supplicate. "I am the friend of your hus-

band; as good an one as he has in the world. Will you not restore him to your favor once more?"

Quick as a flash almost she snatched a sponge from a bowl of water and drew it across the face of the astonished Old Man, at the same time snatching off his wig.

The old masquerader fell upon his knees, his bald head white and nearly one half of his face also deprived of its mask, while the kids whooped and danced, and the parents all pretended to be thunderstruck.

"It is he!" shouted the Old Man's wife.

"Oh! oh! oh!" chorused by the kids.

"In deep disguise?"

"How's this, dad?" asked Shorty.

"What's he given us—smoke?" the Kid asked.

"Looks smoky."

"Very."

"Oh, pop!" the kids cried. "Come off!"

"Oh, Josiah!" cried his wife, pretending to be going off into a faint.

"Wa—wa—!" the Old Man gasped, and then he struggled to his feet.

"What er yer givin' us, pop?" asked the Kid.

"More disgrace," said Shorty.

"Oh, this is terrible," cried all three of the wives, in mournful chorus.

"Give the Old Man a show! Let him go through with his act!" said Peter Pad Burwick, and then all three of the kids danced.

"George! Charles!" plead the Old Man.

"Go away! we want nothing to do with you!"

"But know all about it."

"Nothing at all. Begone!"

CHAPTER III.

THE racket on the Old Man was a tough one, and he was a picture to behold as he stood there, half blackened up and half despoiled of his disguise, looking from one to another.

He had hoped that Shorty and the Kid would come to his rescue and explain how it all came about, but the runty rascals actually went plum back on him after helping him into the snap so far that he could not possibly get out alone.

He looked appealingly to his wife, but he was too comical to awaken sentimental emotion; but, to keep from laughing squarely in his face, she rose, took little California by the hand, and left the room.

"But, say—" the Old Man began to protest when he saw a movement on the part of the whole family to leave him alone.

But they all held up their hands in reprobating protest, and one by one left the room with nobody in it but himself and the colored servant, Ginger.

"They all desert me. Come here, Ginger; what does this mean?"

"I—I gubs it up, Marser Burwick," said Ginger, who, to tell the truth, did not understand what it really meant, but taking it for granted that it was some job that Shorty and the Kid had put up on the Old Man.

He had long been used to that sort of a thing, but what could account for the Old Man's abject and comical portraiture? It was too much for old Ginger.

"Don't know! But I'll know, or I'll blow this mansion to the sky with giant powder," he howled, springing toward the coon with his big fat fist doubled up. "Don't you know me, you exaggerated moke?"

"Seems to me dat I hab seen you somewhere afo'. I—I somehow recognizes your voice," replied Ginger, edging toward the door out of which the others had gone.

"Shut up, sir! Don't you dare to talk to me that way. You know very well who I am, and I will not permit any more of this nonsense. Oh, what a turning over I will give that son and grandson of mine! And how weary will I make that younger kid of mine of life!"

"Betta look out fo' his mudder, sah," said Ginger, with a plantation grin.

"Silence, you 'connecting link!' Go and bring me soap, water, and towels. I'll see who is master here. Those rascals put up this job on me, but I'll make them think that North Pole weather surrounds them before I have finished with them. Go at once!"

"Yes, sah," replied Ginger, and he fled from the comical presence.

"What an egregious old ass I am! Why was I not scalped by Indians before I was found by that rascally son and grandson of mine? Why was I not overwhelmed and sat on by a avalanche, blown out into mid-ocean by a cyclone, chased by a thunderbolt, before I allowed myself to be found by them? But I am in for it; yet I will now assert myself—I will make myself felt by everybody under this roof. Wonder if the women folks were in this snap?"

He turned and caught a glimpse of his shadow in a wall mirror.

He started in alarm, and just then Ginger came in with the required toilet articles.

There was a grin on his black mug, and the Old Man felt to see if he had a pistol. Not finding any, he concluded not to kill poor "Ginger" just then, but to make him feel lonesome by degrees, until he would want to join the innumerable multitude across the dark river.

"Heah you is, sah," said Ginger, fixing things for the Old Man.

He proceeded to "wash up" without loss of time, Ginger standing by and hoping he would get soap in his eyes.

"Ginger, do you know anything about this wickedness?" he finally asked.

"I—I dun see no wickedness, sah."

"You lie, you black rascal, you lie!" said the Old Man, savagely.

"Sah? I—"

"Shut up!"

"Yes, sah," and he commenced to get the room in order again.

The Old Man regarded himself in the glass. He looked very mad, but very much more like himself than he had looked a moment before.

"Where are George and Charles?" he demanded.

"Dey's gwine out ter ride, sah."

"The deuce they have. Where are the ladies?"

"Dey's all jus gwine out to ride, sah."

"Confound it, is everybody out?"

"Yes, sah, all but me an' de cook."

"The children also?"

"Don know 'bout dem, sah."

"Well, you just go to thunder, will you?"

"Yes, sah."

"Bab!" and the badly riled old man made a rush from the room.

"Fo' suah, dat ole man am clean gone off his cabase," said Ginger, when left alone. "He cut up drefful lately. But it am no wonder, fo' dem boys am wuss'n gad flies. They'll land him in de lummetick asylum befo' he knows it."

The Old Man was not long in convincing himself that every member of the family had gone out, and that he was alone in the house with the servants.

Why had they gone?

Ah! were they afraid of him? Was it because they did not dare to meet him after what had transpired? Most likely.

And this thought made him feel better.

But where were the kids? Ginger had said nothing about their having gone out with the family. Indeed, it was most likely that they had not gone—but where were they?

If he could only find his own son Cal, what an opportunity there would be for him to dust the seat of his little trousers. But he was rather shy on that point, and so, after going all over the house, he went out into the back yard and sat down on his favorite seat.

He always went there when he was hot and wanted to cool off. It was his mental refrigerator, so to speak.

It was a single garden-chair placed near the partition fence, over which grew in the summer time an arbor of honeysuckle, and the Old Man used to sit there frequently and smoke, and think what a happy man he was.

But on this particular occasion he was thinking what a miserable wretch he was.

He thought he heard some childish laughter and whispering in the adjoining yard, but that was nothing strange, since his neighbors had several young rascals, almost as bad as were the Shorty kids.

He lighted a cigar, threw the match away, and then set back for a thoughtful smoke.

But before he had thrown off a dozen puffs or settled it in his mind how many he would kill in order to get "hunk," he suddenly exclaimed "Yah!" dropped his cigar and jumped about a yard high out of his chair.

Then he thought he heard more childish laughter in the next yard. In fact, he was sure of it, but it quickly vanished with the accompaniment of lively footsteps.

But what had that to do with the sting he had received in the most fleshy part of his body?

"Great yarns!" he muttered, "what in the name of thunder was that?"

Then he rubbed the seat of his trousers, and looked at the seat of the garden-chair, and then felt carefully over it.

There was nothing to inflict such a wound as he had received. He felt he had been stabbed.

He looked under the chair.

Ah! what was that string there for, and that piece of whalebone? And that darning-needle, and the hole in the bottom of the chair?

The Old Man gnashed his gums fiercely when he saw that a string led from that piece of whalebone through a hole in the partition fence. He pulled it, and saw at a glance how it worked.

But who had worked it?

He wasn't tall enough to look over the fence, and probably there wasn't anybody there to see if he had been, so he looked up at the neighbors' windows to find if anybody had observed his acrobatic performance.

The smiling mugs of several persons greeted him as he did so, one of which belonged to Ginger, and his was a smile.

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make himself solid with them—had not Shorty and the Kid put in an appearance soon after, each wearing a broad grin.

"Oh, you fellows are very smart, aren't you?" he asked, with a sneer.

"Well, dad, you take the cake," said Shorty.

"Cakel! Soy, he gets away wid der whole bakeshop," added the Kid.

"You fellows put up the job on me."

"Bah! You worked it yourself," replied Shorty.

"Worked her ter der queen's taste," laughed the Kid.

"I think it is too bad the tricks you play on your poor old father," said Angie, his wife, at the same time going from the room.

"And so do I," said Shorty's wife, following her.

"Yes, and so do I," added the Kid's wife, and then she swept from the room also, and although there

youngsters had been having with his father in the garden-chair.

"Yes," he heard him say, "he sat down to have a smoke, and we were all ready for him. Bimeby I gave the string a jerk, and you should have seen dad jump up and paw around in the air."

"Yes, yes!" chipped in Ed and Peter Pad, and then Shorty and the Kid roared in concert.

"Then we skipped out, so he couldn't look over the fence and see us, and I'll bet he thinks he sat down on a hornet."

"Oh, does he?" thought the Old Man. "Great Moses! This is the lad I was making up my mind to forgive! Whew!" and then, seizing his bald head in his hands, he started to retrace his steps. He had heard too much. That innocent kid of his was the worst one of the three. "I must, however, consult

might have passed and been slept off eventually had it not been for youthful Peter Pad.

After remaining quiet a long time for him, he suddenly turned to the Old Man.

"Say, grandpop?"

"Well?"

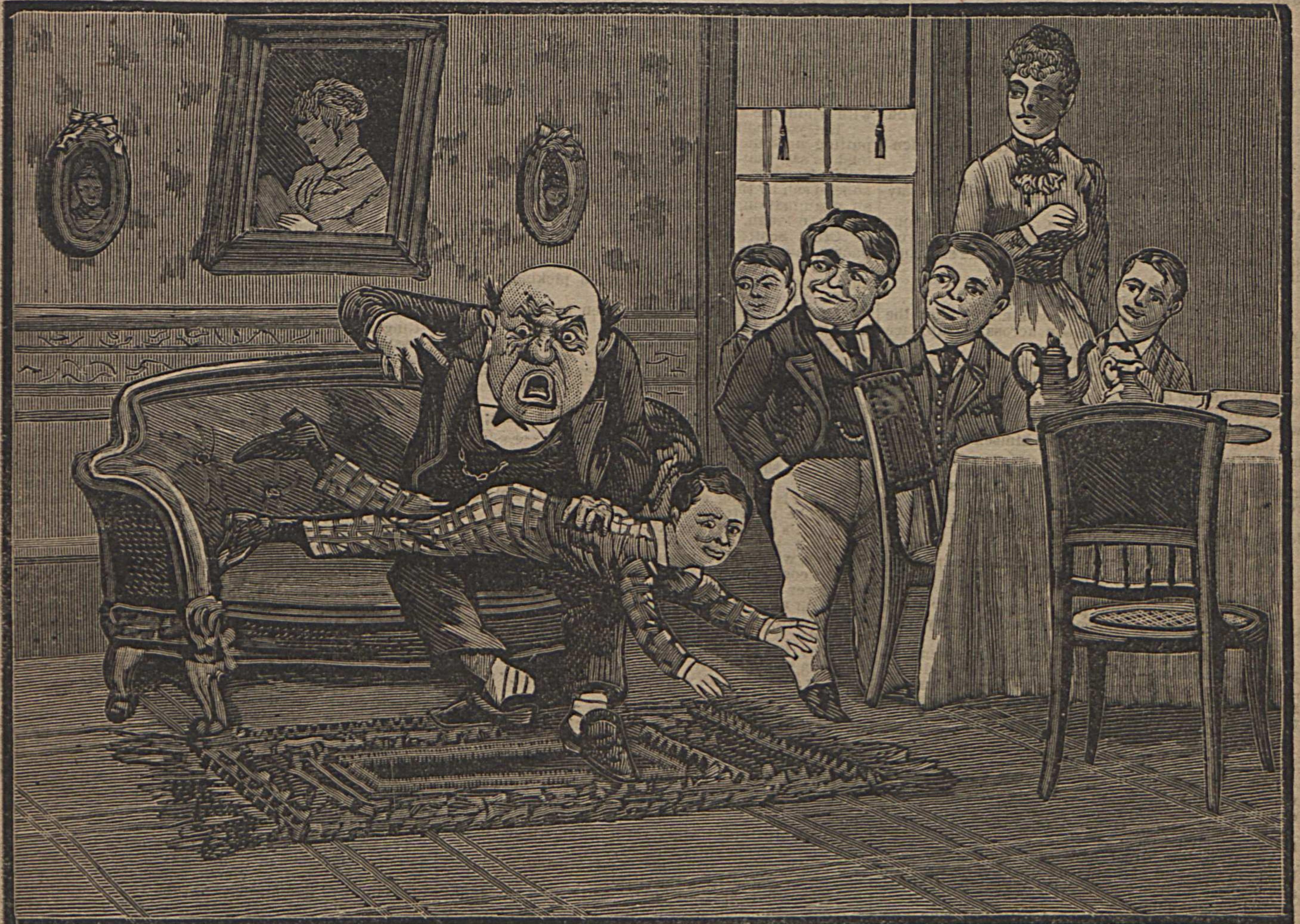
"Won't you give us a song and dance bimeby?"

"What?" roared the Old Man.

"Black up some more and give us a song and dance. Dad'll play for you, won't you?" he asked, turning to Shorty.

"Be quiet, Pete," said his father, not caring to have the thing go any further just then, and all three of the mothers looked savagely at him, while Ginger opened his head with a grin as he stood waiting on the table.

"That's another one against that confounded



"Oh, papa, don't!" pleaded Cal, piteously. "Don't you 'papa' me!" roared the Old Man, and he raised his big hand. He brought that big hand down, even while the boy was grinning. And he lifted it again. He lifted himself and spilled his child on the floor.

were smiles mixed up in these words of sympathy and protest, yet it was balm of Gilead to the Old Man's sore heart, and he mentally resolved to forgive all three of them for the part they had had in the affair and vent his holy indignation on Shorty and the Kid.

"Of course, everybody regards it as an outrage but my own flesh and blood," said he.

"Pop, I's ashamed of yer," added the Kid, at the same time bestowing a look of indignation on Shorty and striding from the room.

"Dad, I's ashamed of yer," added Shorty going over him with a half comical, half contemptuous look, and then fading out at the door, leaving the Old Man entirely alone.

"By the eternal jumping Alexander, I will not stand this chaffing any longer! I'll not live under the same roof with those two rascals any longer. I'll remove my family to a new home, so distant from this that I shall seldom if ever see them, and there, with my wife and son, live in peace and quiet. Ah! I hear his musical voice somewhere about the house, and I'll find him," he said, going from the room.

Yes, under the circumstances the Old Man concluded to forgive little California and see if he couldn't make a man of him.

He followed the sound of the voices and the childish laughter, and this led him to the billiard-room, the door of which was closed, and hearing the laughter of Shorty and the Kid mixed with the youngsters' falsetto, he paused a moment to listen.

His own sweet son, little California, was giving Shorty and the Kid an account of the fun the three

with his mother. I'll tell her all about this, and get her consent to my correcting him, and then—"

The Old Man's palm fairly itched to get at that kid, and he finally resolved to do it, provided Angie objected, if it broke up the entire family. He had stood all the nonsense he intended to stand, and it was getting worse and worse as those kids grew older.

So he went to his wife and told her all. And he did it in such a pathetic way that she consented to the Old Man's spanking the boy, provided he waited until his anger cooled down, so he would not be cruel.

The Old Man winked to himself. Oh, ho! would he cool off? If that boy of theirs was not inclined to stand up instead of setting down for at least a week, after he had a seance with him, he would never ask to punish him again.

And so he tried to resign himself, although while he was trying to do so his wife gave it away to the other two wives, and they all had a good laugh, although the Kid's wife cautioned her to tell him to be sure that he spanked the right kid this time.

All this, of course, became known to Shorty and the Kid, and they saw a chance to again make the Old Man weary of life, and they found little Cal an apt pupil.

That evening when they all gathered in the general dining-room the laugh seemed to have spent itself, and everybody, even those mischievous kids, seemed serious.

Be assured the Old Man was feeling that way.

And as neither of the grown people cared to rattle the old fellow any more that day, the whole thing

coon," thought the Old Man, "and as for that young scapegrace, Pete, I'll —"

"What's ther matter? My pop's no song and dance man," said little Cal, and as he spoke very earnestly, the Old Man began to think he was taking his part, and that there was some good in him yet.

"Well, he blacks up," suggested Ed.

"Oh, that's only fun," said Cal.

"Bully fun, too, wasn't it? But ma, she had to spoil it all," said Ed.

"Hush, all of you!" said the mothers.

"Well, I ain't goin' to see my pop made fun of," protested Cal.

"Oh, the little rascal!" thought the Old Man, and both Shorty and the Kid thought so, too.

"My pop's a ground and lofty tumbler, such as we see in the circus. You ought to see how high he can jump," he added.

This made everybody laugh but the Old Man, and he resolved to steep his good right hand in tan bark in order to toughen it.

"Be quiet, sir!" said his mother, sharply, and for a moment she did not blame her husband for wanting to spank the little rascal.

"Well, he can, can't he, boys?" he reiterated, turning to Pete and Ed.

"You bet!" they both replied, and this so exasperated the Old Man that he got up and left the table.

"Cal, you are a very bad boy, and I am going to let your father punish you, for I think you deserve it," said his mother.

This made Master California feel and look very serious, for he had thought she would shield him from his

ather's wrath, and so the meal was finished and the evening wore away without their coming in contact with the Old Man again, although Shorty and the Kid had fixed things by the aid of a square piece of sole-leather and several carpet-tacks, and posted young California how to adjust the protector in the seat of his youthful trousers.

The Old Man slept on it that night, but it was fully impressed upon his mind that he must spank his son in order to reform him; but he wanted to do it in the presence of the whole family, and especially of the other two kids.

So he resolved to go for him the following morning at breakfast-time.

The old fellow got up very serious, and looked decidedly wicked when he came down to the breakfast-room. The kids were there ahead of him.

He took a seat and called his hopeful youngster to him.

"California?"

"Yes, papa," said the bright little rascal, approaching as sweet as a young cherub.

"Don't you give me any of your 'Yes, papa,' you young rascal! What trick was that you played on me yesterday?" howled the Old Man.

"Where, papa?"

"Out in the back yard in the garden-chair. You know very well where it was."

"No, papa, I never played no trick in the garden-chair," protested Cal.

"What! You young vagabond!"

"No, papa, I was studying my lesson all yesterday afternoon."

"Studying mischief, more like. I know all about it, sir. I heard you confess and laugh over what you had done. Come here, you rascal!" and he snatched him.

"Oh, don't, papa!"

"Don't be cruel, Josiah," said his wife.

"I must be cruel in order to be kind," replied the Old Man, placing his hopeful son across his lap, face downward.

"Oh, papa, don't!" pleaded Cal, piteously.

"Don't you 'papa' me!" roared the Old Man, and he raised his big hand.

He brought that big hand down, even while the boy was grinning.

And he lifted it again. He lifted himself and spilled his child on the floor.

"Oh, thunder and blazes!" he roared, and then began shaking his hand and dancing wildly about the room, while everybody laughed.

"What is the matter, Josiah?" asked his wife, anxiously, for she had not been in the secret.

"Oh, thunder! oh, lightning!"

"Don't, please, papa," plead that little rascal, on his knees, in an attitude of prayer.

"What is it, Josiah?"

"What have yer done, pop—broken him?" asked the Kid, while Shorty laughed in his old, hearty way.

"Have yer bust der kid?"

"Oh, by thunder! oh, by the great horn spoon! I—I'll bust something—I'll bust up this household! I'll—come here, you scoundrel!" and he snatched up the kid, placed him across his lap again, and proceeded to find out what the job and the trouble was.

CHAPTER IV.

THE family gathered around, while the Old Man, with a bleeding hand, proceeded to investigate the cause of his misfortune.

"Oh, Josiah, there is blood on your hand!" cried his wife. "What means it?"

"What is it? Great haddock! just place your hand on the seat of those trousers, and then go out and bring in an iron bar—a piece of gaspipe—and see me render you childless."

"Please don't, papa," pleaded little Cal, who now began to be alarmed at the consequences of the racket he helped play on his father.

"Don't you do it, Josiah Burwick—don't you dare to injure my child!" cried his wife.

"But see what he has done to me!"

"I don't think he did it all by himself."

"But he must have helped prepare the seat of his trousers with those tacks, and somebody has got to suffer for it. I'll break up this household—I'll—oh—oh!" and unable longer to control himself, he rushed from the room, just in time to encounter Ginger, who was about to enter with a supper-tray.

The Old Man was the heaviest.

Ginger therefore went to grass.

In other words, he was downed.

Yes, that is the idea; but, to put it plainly, Ginger was knocked down, and the Old Man landed on top of him, nearly knocking his life out, so great was the impact.

There were ruins of dishes and suppers connected with all this.

Ginger gave forth a grunt that harmonized with the one that escaped the Old Man.

The remainder of the family rushed out to see what the trouble was, and when Shorty and the Kid and those other kids saw the sight they roared.

This of course made him even more wild than the collision had, and, leaping to his feet, he proceeded to kick the prostrate coon with all his might.

"Give it to him!" cried the kids in chorus, "kick him out!"

"Hole on dar, Masser Burwick! I—"

"Yes, confound your black skin, I know you did, and I'll teach you to be more careful!" roared the Old Man.

But just as he was about to give the darky another kick his wife reached for him, taking him by the north'ear.

"Josiah Burwick, have you lost your reason?" cried his wife, pulling him away.

"No, but I have lost my patience."

"When it was your own fault. Are you not ashamed?"

"Lam him some more, pop!" cried his little son, speaking half aside to him.

"Be quiet, you, sir, or I will let your father at you again," said his mother.

"Oh, everybody go to thunder!" growled the Old Man, and then he continued his way down-stairs, leaving behind him a laugh that filled the whole house.

But wasn't he mad, though! No dinner for him. They could have it all if they wanted it; he didn't want any. So he went out to find a doctor to dress his hand.

"My dad's an old tough," whispered Cal to Pete and Ed.

"Old fool, more like," said Ed.

"Well, that's what he means—a tough old fool," said Pete, but none of the dialogue was overheard by their parents.

At that moment they heard the front door bang as though a mule had kicked it shut.

"There, he has gone out," said Mrs. Josiah Burwick. "Oh, you may laugh. Of course you would do that if your father should die."

"Well, it would be sort of funny," said Shorty, with whom the Kid agreed, of course.

"But you both carry it too far. You are forever putting up some job on him. Oh, you needn't pretend to say that you had no hand in arranging that child's trousers. Come here, sir!" and catching her hopeful son by the hand, she rushed him up-stairs for an examination, leaving the others, all but poor Ginger to laugh.

"Great Scott! how he did go for Ginge," said Shorty, laughing.

"Hurt yer, Ginge?" asked the Kid, as that black and somewhat blue menial finished picking up the wreck of the supper tray.

"Hurt me! S'pose I's made outer Injun rubber?" he demanded, savagely.

"No, for if you had been his nibs would have raised you to the ceiling every kick," said Shorty.

"It was really too bad, Ginger," said the ladies.

"Too bad! I should say so, an' I'm not gwine ter stan' it any mo'."

"Soy, Ginge, yer didn't stand it that time; yer laid down an' took it," laughed the Kid.

"I tells yer dat I's had 'nough."

"Well, I should say so, if you're not a hog," put in Shorty.

"Wal, I is no hog, an' I luf you know it befo' putty soon," he retorted. "I's gwine ter leab dis yer house. I's got all I wants."

"Don't you want your pay, Ginger?" asked Shorty's wife, whereat young Peter Pad laughed.

"Ob cose I wants my pay, but I's got all I wants ob dis yer treatment. Somebody all de while playin' tricks on me. It used to be bad 'nough befo' dese yer kids growd up, but now it am growin' wuss'n wuss' ebery day."

"Why, Ginge, old man, it keeps your blood in circulation," said Shorty.

"Dar am plenty ob work for dat. I's tired."

"Of what—the work?"

"No, ob de doins dat's gwine on in dis yer house all de time, an' now I gibs you all notice dat I's gwine to leave right off," said he, starting from the room with his tray of broken ware.

"Oh, don't go till you have served dinner," said the Kid's wife.

"I leab dis yer family de fus ob de month, which am next Saturday."

"Oh, only think what yer'll miss, Ginge, if you don't go to the country with us."

"Yes, by golly; dat's jus' what I wants to miss," he replied, going from the room.

"Poor fellow, it is really too bad," said the ladies.

"What will become of us now? Pop is going to break up the family and Ginger will help him."

"Rocky road to Dublin," sighed Shorty.

"But I am not so certain but that it would be a good thing to do," said his wife. "There are too many of one breed under one roof, and the children are being brought up scandalously, even having mischief taught them, when goodness knows they all have enough of it which they inherited, and which develops quite fast enough."

"Well, it's all dad's fault. He's the first Burwick I ever knew," replied Shorty.

"Even that does not alter the fact that the children would be better off if they live apart, and there certainly would be more peace and comfort in such an arrangement."

Shorty didn't want to argue on the point, so he winked to the Kid, who followed him from the room, leaving their wives to settle the matter between themselves.

But it would never do to break up that remarkable family.

What would those two runts do for fun?

"Let's go and see if we can find dad!" said Shorty, and they left the house for that purpose.

"What a racket!" exclaimed the Kid.

"Yes, but we must sin, for if we don't the girls will get mad, and go in for breakin' the fam into three pieces. See?"

"That's so. Let's make up with pop, an' get on ter der quiet for a while," said the Kid.

"Good scheme."

"But how 'bout Ginge?"

"Oh, I'll make it all right with him," and so they went in search of the Old Man, believing that his wrath was somewhat cooled off by this time, the weather being cold.

But they could not find him, the reason being that he had had his hand dressed and returned home by another street, gone to bed without his supper, refusing to speak to anybody.

The others of the family gathered in the dining-room after Ginger had gotten things to rights again, but the meal was partaken of in silence almost. This was a morsel of comfort for Ginger, for he fancied that it was all because he had given notice of his going.

Shorty and the Kid did all they could to restore domestic harmony by taking their wives to the theater, while little Peter Pad and Ed sneaked off to bed, fearing that Ginger would murder them, now that he was going to leave. They didn't even speculate upon what Cal would get from his dad in the morning.

In fact, the stillness that came over the Burwick mansion was remarkable, and Ginger made the most of it with the other servants when they assembled in the kitchen for their supper.

"No use talkin', dey's all broken up," said he, after telling them about his going away.

"Broken up, is it?" exclaimed Biddy Magee, the Old Man's chamber girl. "Faix, an' I'm after thinkin' it is yerself that's broken up."

"How dat?" he demanded.

"Git out, yer nagur! Didn't I see old Mr. Burwick havin' yeas down on ther flure playin' foot-ball wid yeas?" and then the other servants laughed.

He and Doony, the coachman, were the only male servants in the house.

"He—he run agin me an' knock me down."

"I didn't see that, but I seen him tryin' his level best to kick yeas up," said Biddy, and again there was a laugh at his expense.

"But are you really goin' to leave?" asked Doony.

"Yes, an' you's all fools if you don't do de same thing. Dar's some debility gwine on heah all de time," said Ginger.

"Sure, but they never troubles anybody but them as will stand it. Don't be after goin', Ginger, for there'll be no more fun in ther house if yeas do. Sure, it's as good as a circus while yeas stay here for their fun, so it is," said another girl, laughing.

Ginger saw that he wasn't making much of an impression upon his fellow servants, and so presently the matter dropped, although not until they ha'd chaffed him quite mad.

But we have little or nothing to do with the belles or beaux below stairs, or no further than they act as auxiliaries to the greater actors above stairs, so let's leave them there.

The whole family assembled at breakfast the next morning, and, as nothing was said about the events of the night before, the Old Man very soon became himself again. Indeed, it was a point with all of them to turn the conversation in other channels, and before the fast was completely broken old Josiah was wholly himself again, and even went so far as to lay out plans for the coming summer, when they should all go down to their Long Island farm.

Shorty and the Kid were inclined to humor this state of feeling, and so joined in with him soberly. Indeed, nothing happened during the next week to mar the harmony, either below or above stairs, and as Shorty had fixed it with Ginger, that individual began to regard himself as of too much importance to be let go without a struggle, and he believed that the general good behavior was all on his account.

But those who know Shorty and the Kid are aware that it would be impossible for them to remain quiet for any length of time, although they concluded to have their next sport outside of the house, if they could manage it, for they could but admit, as their wives insisted, that the example was developing mischief altogether too fast in boys so susceptible of it as the Shorty kids were.

Yes, peace reigned again in the Shortys homestead, and every member of it was happy, more especially the Old Man. But, of course, those three kids were up to more or less mischief all the time, both in and out of school, but they were very sly about it, and, above all things, avoided playing tricks on the Old Man.

But after a week or so Shorty and the Kid conceived a little snap that they could play on the Old Man, just to keep his blood in circulation, as well as their own; but it was to be worked outside of the house, where it would have no pernicious effect on those kids.

To carry it out successfully they had to have a confederate, and they knew just the man.

Those runty rascals would work a week any time, if needs be, to get a laugh on their bald-headed old father and grandfather, and sometimes one of them would pretend to be a confederate of his, and work up a job with him against the other, which, however, was sure to turn against the Old Man.

He was as fond of a joke as either of them, but they were two to one against him always.

Well, the snap I am speaking of was this: a very simple one, to be sure, and one not easily written up, since the most of it was acting, and should be seen acted in order to be fully appreciated.

But I will do my best to present it to the reader so that he can "catch on" and enjoy at least a portion of the fun there was in it, I being present when it was worked.

It was customary for all three of them—the Old Man, Shorty and the Kid—to take a walk down Broadway pleasant mornings before breakfast to get up their appetites.

Sometimes these walks passed off all pleasantly enough

with his arms, as though to an assistant further up the street.

Several others had stopped to see what was going on before the Shortys arrived, and, of course, they stopped too, Shorty and the Kid looking up the street and manifesting much interest.

The Old Man always made it a point never to let anything transpire that he did not find out all about, and, naturally, he wanted to know what was going on now.

"What is it?" he asked of Shorty.

"Give it up," replied the little wag, while the conederate was going through his motions, and which was fast drawing a crowd.

"What are you doing?" the Old Man finally asked, approaching the stranger.

"Doing? Trying to get that fool up there to under-

what that dumpy old man was holding that rod up for.

"He's crazy, I guess," replied Shorty.

"Well, I should say so. Say, mister, what are you holding that rod for?"

"To keep it from falling," replied the Old Man, for he was beginning to feel a sense of the importance of his position and could talk back.

"Anything up?" asked another man.

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"This pole."

"But what is being done?"

"Surveying Broadway for a widening."

"Oh!" chorused a dozen voices, and at once the interest became greater.

Many had heard of this project, for it had been agi-

Finally the Old Man began to weaken, and for the first time to smell a rat.

He looked at Shorty and the Kid, but those two worthies were quietly pulling away at their "Rosa Perfectors," and looking as honest as two lambs.

Finally a policeman made his way into the crowd—probably seeing there was no danger in it—and proceeded to investigate.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

"Holding this stick for the surveyor."

"What surveyor?"

"The one that is surveying for the widening of Broadway. He has gone to see his assistant, and I wish he would return, for I am tired. Won't you be good enough to relieve me, Mr. Officer? Just hold your thumb on that notch there, like that. He'll be back presently."



He was standing on the sidewalk, looking as sober as a judge as he held the rod, and everybody was asking everybody else what was going on; but no one seemed to know.

"Stand my signals," replied the man, at the same time making more of them.

"What for?"

"Why, for business, of course."

"What business, might I ask?"

"Surveying. Confound that fellow!"

"Surveying? Surveying what?" asked the Old Man, now becoming interested.

"Broadway."

"What for, pray?"

"It is to be widened."

"Oh, indeed?"

"Yes. Say, my dear sir, will you have the kindness to hold this pole, with your thumb right on that notch, while I go up and knock some sense into the head of my assistant?" he asked, earnestly.

"To be sure I will," said the Old Man, ever ready to help anybody.

"If you will be so kind, Hold your thumb just there, please, until I return."

"Certainly," said he, taking the pole and holding it as directed.

Shorty and the Kid looked sober, but swapped winks.

"Not too much trouble, I hope?"

"Oh, no. Always ready to oblige."

"Thanks. That is more than can be said of everybody. Just that way until I return."

With this the supposed surveyor started on a run and was soon lost to sight in the crowd that by this time filled sidewalks and street for nearly a block.

He was standing on the sidewalk, looking as sober as a judge as he held the rod, and everybody was asking everybody else what was going on; but no one seemed to know.

Finally one old rooster asked Shorty if he knew

tated many years, and the interest grew quite as fast as the crowd did.

But where was that surveyor?

It seemed to the Old Man that he had been gone long enough to go to Harlem and back, but he came not.

He began to tire of holding his thumb on the pole, and finally the perspiration oozed from his bald head down over his fat face.

But he was as true as Cassabianca that stood on the burning deck. He had volunteered to help a man, and he was bound to do it.

Minute followed minute, until half an hour had passed, and that surveyor came not.

What did it mean?

Finally the crowd began to guy the brave, kindly Old Man, some of them actually regarding him as a lunatic.

"What's the matter with the old crank?"

"Who stood him up there?"

"What is it?"

"Somebody's cigar-store sign misplaced!"

"He's standing for his picture!" and a dozen other comments were made by the crowd, that by this time had begun to understand that there was a joke of some sort afloat, and they became quite merry, even little boys taking part in the fun.

But the Old Man didn't waver. He felt that he was doing a kindly act. He even looked toward his sons for endorsement.

"Stick to it, dad," said Shorty, and this, of course, drew attention to him.

Several persons recognized the renowned joker, and instantly came to the conclusion that this was a job of his own putting up, and this only increased the volume of laughter.

"Not much! Old Man, you are a fool."

"How so?"

"Because you have been made one. Give me that pole and move on, or I shall have to take you in for collecting a crowd," said he, taking the pole from him, while the crowd sent up a perfect cyclone of yells and laughter.

The Old Man wilted, and sought Shorty and the Kid for consolation.

And of course he got it.

CHAPTER V.

"WHAT is the meaning of this, do you suppose?" asked the badly sold Old Man of Shorty, while the laughing crowd surged around them.

"Give it up, but I guess the cop's dead right," replied Shorty, still looking honest and sober.

"Come, now, move on!" said the policeman following the old victim up.

"All right, officer, but this is an outrage," he protested, for he was right mad by this time.

"Of course it is, but such outrages are only played on fools. Move on!"

"But let me—"

"If you don't meander I shall take you in—hear that?" replied the officer, severely.

"Confound you, sir, you are a servant of the people, and it is your office to protect citizens against outrage and insult, not to heap more of it upon them," roared the Old Man, and this was received by the crowd with laughter and cheers.

"Dead right, dad," whispered Shorty, for both he and the Kid were only too anxious to have the Old Man taken in.

"It is my duty also to preserve the peace which you are fracturing," replied the officer.

"I am an honest citizen, sir!" he roared.

"I am not sure of that. How do I know but you are a stool for pickpockets and took this method of getting together a crowd for your pals to work on."

"Great Scott!" he roared again, and just then everybody felt to see if they had lost anything.

"Oh, come along! I'll waste no more time over you," said the officer, giving him the collar right vigorously.

"But I tell you, sir, I am a respectable citizen, a heavy property owner."

"I don't care if you are old Vanderbilt. I shall take you in."

"You dare not, sir!"

"Come along!" and he yanked him, amid the laughter and jeers of the following crowd.

"George! Charles! Where are you?" he called, looking behind for his sons.

But they had mingled with the crowd, and were not to be seen.

"Come along!" and that big policeman, with the surveyor's pole in one hand and the mock surveyor's victim in the other, rushed him in the direction of the station-house, followed by the crowd, of which, naturally, his son and grandson were parts.

Several persons recognized him, and wondered what he had been doing, as, also, what the policeman was carrying the surveyor's pole for.

Among them was their old time friend, Shanks, whom the reader will doubtless remember.

He instantly suspected one of Shorty's practical jokes, and looked through the crowd for him.

Finally, when near the station-house, he discovered both he and the Kid.

The greeting between them was cordial.

"But what is all this?" asked Shanks, pointing to the Old Man.

"A snap, that's all. Come on," said Shorty, and while on the way he explained to his old friend all about it.

"Up to your old rackets yet, eh? I thought when you all got married and settled down that you had given them up," said Shanks.

"So we did. Come along, and you'll see it was none of our racket—eh, Kiddy?"

"Nary rack," replied the grinning little joker.

"I don't believe it. But I'll see it out," said Shanks, entering the police station with the others.

The captain happened to be behind the desk at the time, and up before that king of clubs the poor old jack of hearts was taken.

The captain knew of the Old Man, and knew both he and his sons by sight, but wondered what he could have done to be taken in.

"Captain, this is an infamous outrage!" the Old Man shouted, as soon as he entered the room. "An outrage, sir, on a peaceable citizen and a tax-payer, sir, and if I don't break this officer I'll break his neck for submitting me to this indignity."

"Keep cool, Citizen Burwick, please," said the captain, and just then his eyes rested on the renowned Shorty.

"Oh, you know me, then?"

"Very well. What is it, officer?" he asked, addressing the stalwart whose prisoner he was.

"It's an outrage, sir, that's what it is, and I have evidence of it," roared the prisoner.

"Keep cool, please. Explain, officer," and he proceeded to tell the story.

"Now, don't you see, captain?" asked the Old Man, triumphantly.

"Yes, Mr. Burwick, I see that you were creating a crowd on Broadway, and that the officer did his duty in arresting you when you refused to move on."

"But I was trying to explain."

"And in doing so you only made matters worse. I don't blame you for being indignant, for you were the victim of a practical joke; but you should have skipped the viaduct when the officer requested you to do so. Have you any suspicion as to who put the job up on you?" he asked, glancing at Shorty, whom he believed to be the author of it, as he had been of numerous other sells and practical jokes.

"No, sir; I was walking quietly along with my sons here, when we espied a man holding that pole and making frantic gesticulations with his arms as though signalling to somebody a distance up the street, and naturally we stopped to ascertain what was going on. The man informed me that he was surveying for the widening of Broadway, and asked me as a favor to hold the pole while he went and overhauled the assistant, who failed to understand his signals. I did so, and—"

"Was sold," broke in the captain, with a laugh, in which the others joined.

"Well, I—"

"That settles it. You may go, but don't get caught so easily next time. Shorty!" he added.

"Yes, cap," he answered, advancing.

"Just you look out for your father in future, and see that he don't become the victim of any more practical jokers," said he, with a significant look.

"All right, cap," replied the runty wag; and the whole party left the station-house, laughing.

When I say "all," I mean all but the victim of the joke. The only thing he saw that was worth smiling at was the escape he had in not being held.

But they started for home, where the family was waiting and wondering what kept them so long from breakfast.

"Where have you been, Josiah?" asked the Old Man's wife, as all three of them entered the dining-room.

"Well, the fact is, deary, we took rather a longer walk than usual this morning," said he, cheerfully, for he had made Shorty and the Kid swear that they would not give the snap away at home.

"Well, I should say you did. We have waited breakfast for an hour, and finally the children had to have theirs in order to get to school in time.

"I am very sorry, my dear, but it shall not occur again," said he, seating at the table, as did the others.

But there was a look on the mugs of both Shorty and the Kid that attracted the notice of the three wives. It looked like a grin that was just ready to burst into a laugh.

"What did you find in your walk that was so interesting?" asked the Old Man's wife.

"Oh, several things," said he, handing a plate with a bit of juicy steak on it to Ginger to be passed to her.

"They're surveying Broadway for a widening, and we became interested in the work," said Shorty, with an addition to his grin.

The Old Man tried to kick him under the table, but his legs were too short.

"Widen Broadway! Well, that's funny."

"Yes. So we stopped to see 'em do it."

"Yes; that's all, my dear," put in the Old Man, and again he tried to kick Shorty's shins, but failed as before.

"Then we took a run round ter der station-house," added the Kid, as he sweetened his coffee and looked honest.

The Old Man could have strangled the little runt. He tried to catch his eye to remind him of his promise, but could not.

"To the station-house!" they all exclaimed.

"What for?" asked Mrs. Josiah Burwick.

"Oh, simply went around there to call on our old friend, Captain Williams," said the victim, feeling himself on pins and needles.

"Indeed! I never knew that you were friends with that renowned king of clubs."

"Oh, yes, old friends."

"Yes, he's king of clubs, but dad held the ace, and so we thought we'd go round and take him—that's all," said Shorty.

"Ha, ha, ha! Very good—very good!" said the Old Man, laughing just as though he regarded it as a joke, when in reality he was fast losing his appetite under the sly digs his rascally boys were giving him.

But they had no notion of giving him away. They only wanted to worry him, although in doing so they greatly aroused the curiosity of their wives.

However, they got through with their belated breakfast all right, and each went about the business of the day—such as it was—as though nothing had happened.

Shorty and the Kid retired to the billiard-room for a smoke and their usual morning game, and to let out the laugh that had been so long confined, while the Old Man took his wife out for a drive.

Taken all in all, it was a good joke, and, when he came to look it over dispassionately, no one appreciated it more than the Old Man did. He was fond of a joke—especially when he was not the victim of it, as so many others are.

But the more he thought of it the more he regarded it as a good thing, and that evening, when he was watching Shorty and the Kid playing billiards, he let himself out and admitted that it was a good one, even if he himself was the victim.

"Do you know, boys, I have a great mind to get a pole and play that joke on somebody else?" he asked.

They both stopped and looked at him.

"You?" they asked.

"Yes. Why not? Somebody has played it on me, and why should I not get even?"

"Bah!" both together, and they resumed playing.

"Why?"

"You can't play no joke, pop," said the Kid.

"I can't!"

"No, yer only good ter play jokes on."

"Oh, that's your opinion, is it, you little runt? I'll show you," he retorted, savagely.

Shorty remained silent, but he swapped winks with the Kid while making a "run."

"All right. Show."

You fellows think that nobody but you can play a joke. I'd have you understand that I, in my younger days, played many a one, brighter than you ever played, and I will show you something to laugh at yet."

"Oh, take a nap! Yer've been hoistin'," said the Kid, giving his ball a vicious stroke.

"What!" roared the Old Man.

"Oh, break! Come off, Kiddy. Give the Old Man a chance. If he wants ter work that snap, put down and let him," said Shorty, with seeming indignation.

"All right. I'm an oyster. Go ahead, pop, an' see how she pans out," replied the Kid, depreciatingly.

"Never you mind for your grand-pop. He isn't the slouch you take him for," said the Old Man, and he reminded them of three or four rackets that he had been the successful putter up of, and finally talked down all objections and went to bed, full of the idea of getting even for the joke played upon him.

Shorty and the Kid enjoyed a hearty laugh, and finally resolved to help the Old Man out to the best of their ability, and the reader understands how they would naturally help him.

By the next day he had settled it in his mind how he would work his snap, and not only confided the secret to the boys, but invited them to go down-town and see him work it out the following day.

This they agreed to do, and now they had a chance to get in their own work.

But they were bound to congratulate him all the same, the hypocrites.

"Boss snap," said Shorty.

"Isn't it, though?" asked the Old Man, in a delight over the prospect.

"Better'n the other one, sure," said the Kid.

"Of course it is."

Well, the next morning after breakfast he showed them a pole that he had procured, one much more

like those used by surveyors than the one he had been sold by, and they accompanied him down-town, taking care that the wives did not see him, for, woman-like, they would be sure to want to know what he was going to do with it.

They got out at Rector street, and started at once for Trinity Church, the scene of the Old Man's proposed joke.

"Now just you fellows who think I can't work out a practical joke, you stand by and see whether I can or not," said he, as they arrived in front of the church.

"All right, dad. Let her go."

"Yes, we'll cap for yer," added the Kid.

"Oh, I don't want any of your capping. This snap will work itself," said he.

"Well, start the boom. We'll gaze," replied the Kid, and he and Shorty withdrew a few yards to watch the performance, but they could scarcely contain themselves.

The Old Man took his station on the sidewalk about a hundred feet north of the church and erected his pole.

Then he began to look up at the church spire in a very earnest way, and this, of course, attracted the attention and aroused the curiosity of those passing by, and in less than a minute two dozen of them stopped to see what was going on.

Then the Old Man moved the pole a few feet in another direction, and again looked up at the church spire.

Other dozens stopped, and every face would turn from the painted pole to the spire, toward which he was anxiously looking.

Then he moved the pole a little, and more people stopped to see.

One old Wall street broker ventured to ask somebody what was going on, but as no one appeared to know, he approached the joker.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"Please don't bother me," replied the Old Man, moving the pole a few inches.

"Well, you might be civil," retorted the broker, sharply.

"And you might mind your own business," replied the Old Man, without removing his eyes from the church spire.

"Bah!" and the broker forced his way through the jeering crowd and started for his place of business.

"Bully for old dumpling!" suggested some one in the crowd, and although a laugh followed this, the Old Man never took his eyes from the church steeple.

"Oh, no. His laugh would come later on.

Then he elevated his right hand, while holding the pole in his left, and put up first one finger and then another, as though in communication with somebody in the tower.

This, of course, produced additional interest. A large crowd had gathered by this time, and every face was turned upward at the spire, and every owner of a face wanted to know what was going on.

Finally a big, strapping fellow approached him, and authoritatively, almost, demanded on behalf of public curiosity what he was doing.

"Ah!" thought the Old Man, "this is just the jay I wanted to catch."

He moved the pole a little, and without appearing to notice the big questioner, he manifested much impatience because of somebody who wasn't fit to be an engineer.

"Say, old man, what are you doing?" the big fellow asked again.

"Oh," replied the Old Man, "if I had a decent assistant I could tell you. But that fellow up there don't seem to know beans. I am taking a scientific observation in order to determine whether that spire is out of plumb or not, as has been asserted. But my man don't seem to understand his business. Would it be asking too much of you to hold this rod for me a minute while I go up and overhaul that donkey?"

"Certainly not. Do it with pleasure."

"Thanks! Just hold it this way, with your thumb on that mark, and I will be ever so much obliged to you."

"All right. Go ahead," said the man, taking the pole, seemingly as unsuspicious as he was himself only a little while before.

The Old Man chuckled to himself and started for the church entrance, knowing that the doors were always open, and that anybody could enter who chose to do so.

He entered and took a seat in one of the elegant pews, holding his handkerchief over his mouth to smother his exultation, while the crowd outside rapidly became aware of what was going on, and fully one half of it thought they could see that the spire was out of plumb, probably caused by the settling of the foundations, while other knowing ones insisted upon it that they had long been aware of the fact.

Shorty and the Kid drew near, for the snap of the joke would soon be heard.

By this time a thousand faces were upturned, and all sorts of speculations were being indulged in regarding the perpendicularity of the great church spire, the general impression being the survey had been ordered by the Board of Buildings.

Then he got mad, and standing the rod up against the iron fence, he started in search of the old joker, who had by this time laughed himself tired.

He found him. He snatched him by the coat-collar and yanked him out of that pew. He hustled him out of the church as a boy would hustle a rabbit. He got him to the gate, and still holding firmly to his collar, began to kick him, and the Old Man began to yell murder.

"Surveying, are you? Trying to find if the steeple is out of plumb, are you?" he hissed, as he held him almost suspended and administered kick after kick.

"Help! help!" roared the Old Man. "Lemme go! I—I—leme go!"

"Looking for a sucker, was you? Wanted to play a joke on somebody, eh? How do you like it, as far as you've got?"

"Any bones broken?" inquired Shorty.

"Wha—where are we?" he gasped.

"In a dugout on wheels."

"Where is he?"

"Who?"

"That—that mule—that roustabout," said he, looking from the carriage window.

"Oh, we got away from him. How do you feel?" asked Shorty.

"My boy, I—I think I've been stabbed," said he, sorrowfully.

"Oh, I guess not," and they both laughed.

"Stabbed with a No. 14 boot, I guess," said the Kid, with continued laughing—but in spite of that the Old Man began to feel himself over.

He seemed to want to ascertain if he was all there, and all in one piece.

Shorty and the Kid, having had their laugh out, entered the room just then.

"Well, how do you feel now?" asked Shorty.

"Not very chipper, my son," said he, sadly.

"Soy, pop, what did I tell yer?" the Kid asked.

"About what?"

"Playin' jokes. Soy, yer a dandy ole joker, arn't yer?"

"Boys!" said the Old Man, holding up his hands,

"do you see them?"

"Cert. How?"

"You see me elevate my pickers and stealers, don't you?"

"Oh, yes."

"I'm done."

"Well, I should say so."

"No more funny business fer me."



He elevated his right hand, while holding the pole in his left, and put up first one finger and then another, as though in communication with somebody in the tower. This, of course, produced additional interest. A large crowd had gathered by this time, and every face was turned upward at the spire, and every owner of a face wanted to know what was going on.

"Shame!" cried Shorty and the Kid, who rushed to the Old Man's assistance.

"Take him, or I'll give him to a policeman," said the seeming victim of the joke, and with a parting kick he released him, and Shorty at once hustled him into a carriage and told the Jehu to drive for the Astor House with all speed.

A policeman rushed upon the scene at that moment, and began to swing his club and to seek for the cause of the trouble, while the crowd scattered, seeing the joke, and everybody had a laugh.

CHAPTER VI.

OLD MAN Burwick had lost his hat, and he nearly fainted when Shorty and the Kid hustled him into the carriage and ordered the driver to whip for the Astor House.

The kicking and rough handling he had received as the result of the practical joke with the surveyor's pole had broken him all up.

He was as limp as a wet swab.

He was out of danger, thanks to the foresight of Shorty, but he scarcely realized it.

The only idea that possessed his mind for some time was that he had been lifted by a derrick and kicked by a very healthy mule.

His son and grandson knew he was not seriously hurt, but they didn't know how badly frightened and broken up he was, all the same.

"Wa—wa—" were his first expressions, and then he looked wildly around, finally recognizing his carriage companions.

"How are yer, pop?" asked the Kid.

Shorty and the Kid would have been more than human if they could have kept from laughing under the circumstances, and yet they scarcely had the heart to do so just then, the Old Man looked so sad.

They stopped at Knox's and bought him a new hat, after which they went to the Astor and engaged a room for the saddened joker, after which they left him to himself awhile and went down-stairs to roar where it would not hurt the Old Man's feelings or arouse his suspicions that they had worked the snap on him for their own amusement.

Left alone, he took a look at himself in the mirror. There were no visible bruises on him, although he felt very sore and lame.

He threw himself upon a sofa and gave away to remorse.

"It served me just right. The fellow ought to have killed me. The idea of an old steer like me trying to work off a practical joke like that. It served me just right, and I'm sorry he didn't kill me. Ah! I'll bet those boys are red in the face laughing at my expense, confound it! What shall I do? They will be sure to give it all away at home, and I shall never hear the last of it, especially if those kids get hold of it. I must buy them off somehow. Oh, dear, I here solemnly foreswear all practical jokes. Somehow or other they are sure to go back on me when I attempt to play them on anybody. Yes, I swear off, swear off making a confounded old ass of myself. Oh, what a kicking that was!" he added, with a sigh, as he slowly got up and ran his hand tenderly over that portion of his anatomy that had received the thrusts and contusions of indignation.

"Well, dad, I shouldn't call it funny biz at all, so far as you are concerned. But it might have been funny for the fellow who yanked you out and did ther heavy business, and maybe ther crowd enjoyed it, but I don't think you did."

"No; I put up my hands, I swear off. No more practical jokes for me. I am getting too old. See? I could used to do it when I was young like you, but I am too old now, and this settles it."

"Well, I should say so with a snicker," said Shorty, and in spite of himself he had to join in the laugh.

"But, I say?" he began.

"What?"

"It was a good one."

"What?"

"The joke."

"Oh, I thought you meant the kicking."

"That's all right. It simply happened so, but I had the laugh on that gawk."

"Yes, but he laughed last. See?"

"Yes, but if it had only gone through as I started it, what a joke it would have been on that fresh rooster who held the pole!"

"Oh, very much."

"But, say, boys?" and he looked around.

"What?"

"This is on me. See?"

"Well, I should say so," said Shorty.

"Yes, pop, we saw it was on yer; we saw him get on ter yer an' hump," said the Kid, laughing.

"Well, that's all right. I weaken and hold up my hands. The laugh is on me, and I'm done."

"Done on one side, I should soy," said the Kid.

"You fellows have got the laugh."

"It looks like it, dad."

"Now don't give it away, and I'll buy you each a handsome rifle."

"All right. I'm mum," said Shorty.

"I'm an oyster," added the Kid.

"That's a go. It was a bad old sell on me; I admit it, but I wouldn't have it leak out for the world, especially at home. Now I'll go down and get barbecued up a bit, after which we will go home. Say we have been to a target excursion and I will make it all right with you. See?"

Two hours later they were all at home, and the old man's joke was a thing of the past, and, although he had foreseen jokes, yet he could not help thinking that he would have had the boss racket of the season if—

the sidewalk overhead, and before they could realize what was going on a load of coal came pouring down upon them, and in no time they were buried out of sight.

But not exactly out of sound, for they yelled murder, nearly frightening the life out of old Ginger, who was superintending the delivery of the coal.

The entire household was alarmed, and the kids were finally dug out, black as the coal surrounding them. Fortunately it was fine coal, or they would have been killed.

But while all this was going on, the proprietor of the house from whence the yell had come, following the shot at the cats, came over and indignantly demanded an explanation.

The bullet, instead of doing any harm to the feline politicians on the partition fence, had punctured an

"Oh, you go shoot yourself!" said Pete, and then he and Ed withdrew to see if they could not concoct some snap with which they could get even with that awfully good boy.

It was a day or two after that before they hit upon what they thought would just make them hunk with Cal, and it had the elements of tragedy in it, for by this time they had talked the thing over until they both wanted gore; and, to make matters worse, the Old Man had given his son another quarter for being a "good boy," while Shorty and the Kid had simply given their hopefules the cold shoulder.

They worked it with the assistance of a big boy who was a clerk in a hardware store over on Eighth avenue, and liked fun full as well as he did work.

His boss had several big metallic torpedoes, capable of bursting up a house, and it had for a long time been



They both met as that big torpedo exploded, bursting the barrel into a thousand pieces, alarming the whole neighborhood and scattering ashes and garbage all over it.

Yes, that same old "if."

Both Shorty and the Kid were as good as their words. They said nothing about it at home, and the Old Man was as good as his, for he bought them both a nickel-plated rifle, the best he could find.

This squared matters, and everything would have been lovely in the Shorty mansion had not the two kids, Peter Pad and Ed, discovered those rifles one day soon after, and, what was worse, they found the cartridges belonging to them.

It was a great find for them. At first they talked of running away and going out West to assist in thinning out the aborigines, but they finally compromised on cats, probably because just then they discovered a pair of them on the back yard fence, one of whom was evidently a Republican and the other a Democrat, and they were having a debate.

I am sorry to say that my namesake was the first to respond to the boyish impulse. He drew a bead on one of those cats, at least he thought he did, and he pulled the trigger.

There was a report from that rifle pointed out of the back window, and those felines vanished like flitting shadows.

At the same moment there was a yell in the rear of the opposite block, which convinced the youngsters that something had happened, most likely a murder, and they skipped for cover, just as their parents rushed for the room to learn the cause of the report.

They went down into the cellar and hid in the coal-bin, all of a tremble and fully believing that they had shot somebody and would be hung for it if found.

They laid low and scarcely breathed. Finally the cover of the coal-hole was removed by somebody on

aquarium, shattering it and scattering eels, lobsters, crabs, and various other marine curiosities all over a parlor floor, nearly frightening the life out of a young lady who happened to be seated near it.

It was a fortunate escape for her, but the proprietor of the aforesaid young lady, also of the bursted aquarium, was out and wild for satisfaction.

Shorty tried to explain it to him, but he wouldn't have it. He wanted satisfaction, or, if he couldn't get that, he was willing to take fifty dollars for the ruin of his aquarium.

Shorty paid it, and then went for the most bulbous portion of young Peter's trousers.

Never were youthful trousers more beautifully dusted, for Shorty was mad.

Ed escaped with a "jawing," while young California postured as a real good boy.

"I would not do such an awful thing, papa," said he to the Old Man.

"I am glad to hear you say so, my boy," said the Old Man. "They are very bad boys, and you must not do as they do. Here is a quarter of a dollar for you to buy taffy with," he added, proudly.

Cal took the money, and shortly afterward was making life a burden to Pete and Ed by munching peanuts and sucking taffy until his face was all daubed up with it, but all the while refusing to share with them because they were such bad boys.

"Oh, we'll get hunk with you," said Pete.

"You bet we will. You're a duff, you are," added Ed, savagely.

"Yum, yum! but isn't this good, though? This is what you get for being a good boy and not shooting at cats," said Cal.

a study with this youth how he could explode one of them and not take the responsibility of it on himself.

Knowing Pete and Ed, and knowing that they wanted to get hunk with that goody-good kid, he gave them a hint of how the thing could be done so as to make him sick.

The idea, as he imparted it to them, was to put this torpedo in the ash-barrel, light the fuse, and bet with their enemy that he couldn't jump over the barrel, and have it explode just as he attempted to do so.

The thing looked all right to the boys, and they skinned around until they got two dollars to give this enterprising clerk, who proposed to steal the torpedo from his boss, thinking he would never miss it, as they were not saleable articles.

He posted them completely as to how long the fuse would burn before the explosion, and just how to work the caper in order to give that good boy a bounce he would not forget.

They started home with it, but, most unfortunately, Ginger had taken their ash-barrel in and locked it up in the cellar. This was rather a set back, and they were considering the proposition of postponing the thing until some other day, when Ed discovered that the ash-barrel belonging to their next-door neighbors still stood on the sidewalk, and had not yet been emptied for some reason or other.

"Great scheme!" they both agreed.

So Pete dug a hole with a stick down into the ashes and garbage the barrel contained, and after a deal of work arranged the fuse so that it could be lighted on the sly.

They had scarcely got through with this part of the business, when Biddy, the kitchen-girl of the neighbor,

bor's house, discovered them; and as she knew them to be bad boys, and as she had had it in for them for a long time, she resolved on revenge.

After a while Cal came out, and, to make matters worse, he was munching something very arrogantly.

"Oh, you're no good," said Pete.

"What's the matter with candy? Yum, yum!" replied Cal, smacking his fat chops.

"Oh, candy's for kids," said Ed. "We are gymnasts."

"What's gymnasts?"

"Toughs as can do things. We can run and jump, and we are going to join a club. But you're a duffer; you're no good; you can't jump."

"Bet I can!" replied Cal, sucking his candy.

"Bah! Bet you can't put your hands on that ash-barrel and jump over it?"

"Bet you that big stick of candy I can!"

"I'll go you!"

"He can't do it; he'll cheat," said Ed.

"No, I won't. You fellows think you are awful smart. Let Pete stand here and see if I don't do it on the square."

"All right. I'll stand here right by the barrel; you make a run and jump," said Pete, going close to the barrel with a match, ready to light the fuse.

"Oh, he can't climb over it with a step-ladder," said Ed, with aversion.

"Bet you my jack-knife against your top?"

"I'll go yer!" replied Cal, who by this time had been well worked up, and he at once started back for the run.

Pete struck a parlor-match and lit the fuse without attracting notice.

But the Irish kitchen girl had been watching, and saw him strike the match.

Believing that she had caught him in an incendiary act, she rushed out to grab him and call for the police, just as Cal began his run to make the leap over the barrel.

She hindered Cal a little, but they both met as that big torpedo exploded, bursting the barrel into a thousand pieces, alarming the whole neighborhood and scattering ashes and garbage all over it.

All three of the kids were comparatively unharmed, and they skipped for cover, which cover was their own basement door.

But that kitchen girl was knocked down by the force of the explosion, covered with ashes and garbage, and she lay kicking on the sidewalk, yelling murder.

The inmates of the Burwick mansion were not only aroused by the explosion, but a crowd quickly gathered, and visions of dynamiters flitted before every vision.

Shorty, the Kid, and the Old Man, together with their wives and servants, rushed out to ascertain what terrible thing had happened next door, while those three kids, astonished and alarmed at the magnitude of their joke, crawled into a pantry in the basement and stood there trembling, and without speaking to each other in their terror.

The kitchen girl still continued to yell murder, even after the neighbors had assisted her to her feet and dusted her off enough to see that no blood was flowing.

"What was it?" asked everybody, and it was a satisfaction to the Shortys to see that their kids were nowhere around.

"Murther, murther!" shouted the girl, and while people were trying to get her to explain a policeman came upon the scene.

"What is it?" he demanded.

"Murther, murther!" whooped the girl.

"Who is murdered?"

"I am."

"Who murdered you?"

"Them b'ys next door. Och, send for a praste," she added.

That Shorty family exchanged glances.

"Why, you are not hurt. Shut up, and tell me what the trouble is," said the policeman.

"I'm kilt entoirely!"

"I guess you are a fool entirely. Who knows anything about this?" he asked, turning to the surrounding citizens.

"There has been an explosion," said one.

"Where?"

"Well, where that wreck of an ash-barrel stood, I should say. At all events, it shook the whole neighborhood," and then everybody began at the same time to state what they knew, which was a very little, so the officer again turned to the girl.

"Sure, them b'ys next door put somethin' in it that went off," said she.

"In what?"

"Theh ash-barrel. I seen wan av them loightin' a match, so I did, an' then there was a bust-up, och, hone!"

"What boys—where are they?" demanded the officer, and then the parents of those kids began to feel sick.

They knew that something bad had been done, but exactly what it was or who of them was guilty they did not know any more than the neighbors did. But the Old Man felt confident that it was not his boy.

"They are very bad boys, indeed," said the lady of the adjoining house, and she had cause for it.

"Where are those boys?" demanded the officer, and he made a break for the basement of the Burwick mansion, followed, of course, by the six parents and many others.

Those parents felt sick.

The officer met Ginger, who assured him that the kids had not gone up-stairs, unless they had flown up into the windows, and then a search was instituted in the basement, greatly to the chagrin and disgust of the parents.

Finally the closet where all three of them were hidden was opened, and they were pulled out one by one, and stood up for inspection.

What a picture it made, with those kids thus arranged, and their parents standing looking on with the policeman pointing to them.

"Whose children are these?" he demanded.

"They are ours!" said the Old Man's wife.

"But our particular boy cannot be guilty," added the Old Man, pointing to Cal.

"Faix, he's ther very spalpeen as did it!" said the kitchen girl, and then there was a tableau.

"I must take all three of them in," said the officer, reaching for the urchins.

CHAPTER VII.

If ever there had been consternation in the Shorty household it was when that officer reached for the three kids who had been the authors of the torpedo explosion in the ash-barrel next door.

Shorty and the Kid weakened in the face of such a thing, but the Old Man was all confidence in the innocence of his boy California.

"It was Cal," said Ed, tremblingly.

"Yes, it was Cal," said Peter Pad, and at once they were again united against the goody-good boy who had just escaped the blowing up they had laid out for him.

"Sure, an' they're all bad," said the girl, who had gotten the worst of it.

"That's so," said several of the neighbors.

"And I shall take all three of them in," added the policeman, marching them out of the basement door.

Shorty and the Kid, together with their wives, were very much exercised over the affair, but the Old Man and his wife were the worst broken up as they followed their "good boy" to the station-house, as did Shorty and the Kid.

Of course they had a certain pull with the captain, and he, knowing all hands so well, would not think of locking up the kids when their parents promised to have them before the police the next morning to answer to the complaint.

So they were all let go, and made tracks for home at a lively rate. But the kids themselves were not nearly so badly broken up as their parents were. They did not know what to say, nor could they tell which of them was the most guilty. At all events, that goody-good boy's character was fractured very muchly, as was the Old Man's faith in him.

Nor did the parents dare to hold a joint convention, feeling certain that it would break up in a row, each pair believing, or at least maintaining that their boy was all right, so the kids were bundled off to bed and each pair of parents retired to their own rooms, there to discuss the matter.

Of course the wives would have it that the kids were just like their fathers, and they had little or nothing to say against the impeachment.

But both Shorty and the Kid began to take tumbles, and to understand that these three boys were undoubtedly three chips of three old blocks, and that the time had come for a change of government, while the wives could see no way out of the difficulty except a breaking up of the family as it had so long existed, and living in separate houses, as far apart as possible, and the turning over of a new leaf of discipline.

Yes, it was a sad day in the Shorty household, and the kids themselves concluded that their apples of fun had turned to ashes.

But the next morning those Spartan fathers, without many words, took their sons before the police justice, who, after hearing the complaint and the testimony, said:

"I am very sorry to see these three chips of three renowned old blocks brought to the bar of justice thus early in life. Pay ten dollars apiece for their escapade, and then take them home and make better boys of them, or I shall take them away from you and send them to a reformatory."

Without a word those fines were paid, and that mournful procession started homeward.

Once at home, each father wrestled with his own son in his own particular way, but it was a sore way for the kids, a sorry one for those fun-loving parents. And during the following week there wasn't a smile in the house above stairs, although Ginger and the other servants smiled very loudly when alone by themselves.

The idea of breaking up the family was indulged in, but as it would soon be time to go to their farm in the country for the summer, it was finally postponed until the next autumn, when they should return to town.

And the kids were also taken down several pegs by what happened, both at home and at court, and for many days afterward they were all three of them as good as angels, and the parental hope was indulged in that they had been frightened out of their evil tendencies.

It took many days, however, to bring back the old smile and the cheerfulness that had before obtained in the Shorty household, and even then those kids were not allowed to participate in it. They were severely frowned down and kept at school. But for all that the old-time smile and geniality gradually returned, although it was understood that everything in the shape of mischief was to be frowned down and severely punished, as the only way (so the wives would have it) of preventing the apt little rascals from becoming just like their fathers.

And sometimes those three fathers would get together and talk over the situation and the prospects of those three kids, and although they could but laugh (when they were not chaffing the Old Man about his boy's being the worst of the three), each one resolved that old Solomon was right, that to spare the rod was to spoil the child.

Of course they could have their rackets as of yore,

but they must be kept from the knowledge of the kids, and they brought up in the way they should go, so that when they were old they would no depart from it.

Amusements abounded as usual, but those kids were kept religiously under and sent to be at sunset every night.

This, of course, was a severe punishment for them, but they managed to worry along by putting up jobs on each other on the sly, and sometimes on Ginger, although on the surface all was peaceable and lovely, and finally the Jid Man in his heart of hearts settled it in his own mind that little "Cal" was all right, and that the two real rogues were Ed and Peter Pad, and this made him so happy that he got again to giving him dimes and nickles to spend when he started for school in the mornings, and, to tell the truth, Shorty and the Kid were secretly doing the same thing for their sons, under the same delusions.

I shall never forget a visit I made to the family about this time. I wanted to see how my little namesake was getting along, being, of course, much interested in his development, as I was in the whole family.

I was more than delighted. All three of them were on their good behavior, and when paraded before me by their proud parents they showed off their lessons smartly, and I began to regard them as improvements over the originals.

"Peter," said I. "I am proud of you—proud to see you such a good boy. Who made you?"

"A good boy?" he asked, innocently.

"Well, yes," I mused, aloud.

"The judge," said he.

"The judge!" I exclaimed, and I saw all three of the lathers frown when I might have expected to have heard them laugh.

"Yes; he was going to send us up."

"And what were you going to do with the ash-barrel?" I asked, soberly.

"Send Cal up," replied both he and Ed.

"But the fun of it was, Mr. Pad, *Biddy* got sent up!" laughed Peter.

They all three joined in the laugh, but I saw that the parents frowned, and knew that I was treading on delicate ground, so I changed.

"That was very naughty, and I hope I shall never hear of your doing any such a thing again. Think how it worried your loving parents," I added.

This seemed to put them in mind of how those loving parents worried them, and the bottom being knocked out of the conversation, they were dismissed and other things were talked of.

But I saw that a change had come over the spirit of that Burwick family, and it was evident that they had all become alarmed at the ready following of the chips after the old blocks, and were doing all they could for reformation.

In fact, the Old Man said to me, as I was about to take my leave after partaking of their hospitality:

"Peter, old man, you must not always judge by appearances or believe all you hear."

"Certainly not," said I.

"You know me, Pete?"

"Oh, yes."

"And you know George and Charles?"

"Well, rather."

"Very good. You know what bad ones they are. Their boys are just like them. My boy is just like me, quiet and innocent but those little rascals of theirs are continually getting him into trouble, so that he appears to be as bad as they are. Now we have found out all about that bombshell in the ash-barrel business, and it proves what I say. My boy California was not in the least to blame."

"I am glad to hear you say so," said I.

"He is a nice, studious boy. Of course, he likes to play, just as all boys do, but he never plans mischief as the other two do."

"How about that pail of water?" I asked.

"Oh, they put him up to that. Now you know that you never knew of my doing such things as the Kid and Shorty have done. Of course, they have told you about certain things which you have written up. That's all right; it is their way and your way of telling them that goes against me. There is no nonsense about me."

"No? How about that surveying racket?"

"What! Did they tell you about that?"

"Well, I heard about it."

"Pshaw! That was only a little pleasantry."

"Yes, it must have been—for you."

I saw that the Old Man was mad, for he had depended upon his sons not giving him away on that snap, so I talked some about the weather and got away as politely as I could.

The next sensational event in the life of the good but bald-headed and unfortunate Old Man, and in his household, happened not long afterward, in this way:

A line or two back I called him unfortunate, and I will leave it to those who know him best and have known him longest if it is not entirely true of him, in a social sense, barring, of course, his last marriage.

Something was forever happening to him, and had he been as unlucky in his business transactions, he would have failed of being the rich man he was.

One afternoon he had some business to transact with his broker down on Wall street, something in the shape of cutting off a lot of coupons and getting them converted into cash.

This was nothing unusual, and so he merely remarked to his wife, as he left the house, that he had some business to attend to down-town and would be home to tea.

Shorty and the Kid were out on the road somewhere exercising their legs, and of course knew

nothing bout the Old Man's doings, and probably cared less, so long as they were having a good time, and the three kids were off to afternoon school.

Well, he transacted his business with the broker, pocketed his bundle of greenbacks, and then, it being at the close of business hours, asked the broker across to Delmonico's to enjoy a bottle of wine and a little pick & something to eat.

They lingered long at the table, the Old Man all the while entertaining him with funny stories of his experience, and especially in connection with his son and grandson.

But they finally separated, and he started up-town, walking leisurely, seeing that he had just about time enough to do so before tea-time.

Now I have spoken of his being unfortunate in many respects, but when we come to get right down to the cause of it, we find that it is owing principally to his curiosity, his desire to see and know all that is going on around him. For example—the surveyor's sell.

Well, on this occasion he had the same itch come upon him in this way.

Arriving at the corner of Broadway and Bleeker street, he espied a crowd of citizens standing around an itinerant vender of some tooth cleaning nostrum, and his curiosity was at once excited, as usual.

"Wonder what is going on here?" he asked of himself, and then he got into the crowd.

The vender was flinging himself and spreading rhetoric all over his listeners, and this at once interested the old man Burwick.

"My friends," he was saying, "by nature I am asthetical. By birth and education I am a gentleman. I have no need to spend my life in this humble calling, for I have money enough to enable me to live like a lord. But I am a friend of my race. By long and earnest study I found that nine in ten have bad teeth, made so for the most part by carelessness and an inability to procure an article safe and easily used that would keep the teeth clean, the gums healthy, and in every respect a perfect dentifrice. As I said before, I am a friend of my race, and I resolved to devote my life, my money, and my energies toward bestowing this long-felt want, and bestowing an inestimable boon on my fellow-travelers to the judgment bar. My friends, I have succeeded! Patient study has enabled me to produce a simple tooth-wash that surpasses anything ever known in the history of dental surgery. I call it the gum eradicating tooth embellisher and restorer, and to convince you that I speak the truth, I will just try it on a boy I see here who evidently never cleans his masticators, and is allowing them to become decayed, so that he can transmit the disgusting blemish to future generations. Come here, my son," saying which he seized a ragged urchin about twelve years of age, and began to work on his hash chewers, all the while keeping up a fusillade of blarney.

The Old Man was interested more, and worked his way up nearer to the eloquent operator.

He did not know, of course—as none of the crowd knew—that this same boy was the vender's accomplice, and that he had a preparation, easily removed, with which he could make his teeth look disgustingly black and neglected, and that he came out of the exhibition with teeth of pearly whiteness.

"Behold!" cried the vender, as he yanked open the boy's jaws; "twenty-five cents a bottle only, a simple charge, just to cover the expense of bestowing this priceless boon on my fellow man. Have a bottle?" he asked, holding one toward the highly interested old man.

"Well, but isn't it hurtful to the teeth?" the Old Man asked.

"No, sir. I assure you on the honor of a gentleman and a man of science that it is perfectly harmless, and not only cleans the teeth to perfection, but perfumes the breath at the same time. Allow me to experiment upon your teeth, my dear sir," he added.

"No, thank you," replied the Old Man, for he wore false teeth, although he didn't want anybody to know it, and had little if any use for a dentifrice.

"It will only take a moment, sir."

"No, sir."

"I'll astonish you."

"No, you won't."

"Oh, give der man a show; what's der matter wid yer?" demanded one of the fellow's stool-pigeons, angrily.

"Yes, let him clean yer meat wrestlers," put it another, and for the first time the Old Man noticed that there were several tough-looking customers about, so he started to retreat.

"Go up an' have yer gnashers shined, ole man," suggested another tough-looking heeler.

"No, sir," and he tried to get away.

But the crowd had by this time caught on to the fun there might be in the snap, and pressed closely about him.

Finally two of the most rusty toughs caught him, and, in spite of his protests, hustled him up before the operator.

They held him while that "friend of man" went for him with his brush and nostrum.

The crowd fairly yelled, for it was an unexpected circus for them.

The Old Man tried to shout for the police, but before he could do so the operator had discovered that he wore a valuable set of "uppers and unders" attached to a gold plate.

These he seized and put in his pocket, while another one helped himself to the victim's watch.

"Cheese it! Cops!" cried somebody, and in less than three shakes of a goat's tail they had scattered, and the victim was left almost alone, although a few citizens remained to find out what the trouble was.

The alarm had been a genuine one, given by some

confederate half a block up Broadway, and a policeman soon rushed upon the scene.

"What's the trouble here?" he demanded, and three or four of the crowd attempted to tell him that a gang of swell mobsmen had been abusing and had probably robbed the short, fat, bald-headed old gentleman, who had just found his hat by the aid of a youthful bystander.

"What's the trouble, Mr. Man?" the officer asked, taking him by the collar.

But the Old Man was not only badly demoralized and broken up by the usage he had received, but he was disabled. He had lost his teeth and could not make himself understood for a cent.

His nose and chin almost touched each other as he opened and shut his mouth in frantic attempts to explain.

"What's the matter with you?" again demanded the officer.

"Yum—num—sum—ough—bob!" was about the way it sounded as the Old Man tried to talk, at which the crowd laughed.

"What? Are you drunk?"

"Oh, chow—far—vas—yash," said the Old Man, pointing to his ravished mouth.

"What is the matter with your talker?" asked the officer to whom it was becoming almost as comical as it was to the crowd.

"Yup—sup—blef—lock!" and in his indignation he gesticulated wildly.

"Does anybody know what the matter is with this old what-is-it?" asked the officer, turning to those around him.

"Say, boss, dere was a tooth-paste peddler here just now, au—" began a boot-black.

"A what?"

"A duffer as fixes toofs, an' he skinned him," continued the artist, at which the Old Man bowed frantically several times.

"Oh, bosh! He's drunk," replied the officer, at the same time hustling him across Broadway in the direction of the Prince street station-house.

He was in for it now, and there was no use of protesting, and so he walked dejectedly along, followed by a curious crowd.

Arrested again, and he as innocent as ever!

Was there ever such luck?

Captain McDonnell happened to be behind the desk when the prisoner was brought in.

"Where did you find it, officer?" asked the dashing, good-natured police captain, and in spite of his official dignity he could not help laughing at the Old Man's comical looking mug.

The officer told the particulars.

"Who are you?" demanded the captain.

"Osh—mas—jum—wick," replied the Old Man, trying to talk.

"What in thunder is that? American?"

The Old Man nodded.

"Go through him, officer," and in doing so he brought out a large sum of money that had escaped the notice of the gang who had robbed him.

The captain was puzzled, but finally handed him a pen and some paper, upon which he wrote:

"My name is Josiah Burwick, No.—Fifth avenue. I have been robbed of my watch and false teeth by a tooth-wash vender. I cannot converse. Send me home, if you please."

Five minutes afterward four detectives were out in search of the robbers, and the Old Man was placed in a hack to be taken home.

CHAPTER VIII.

DURING our acquaintance with the Old Man we have seen him badly broken up on several different occasions, but never so badly as he was after escaping the mob that had hustled him before the tooth-wash vender.

They had robbed him of his gold watch and chain (fortunately overlooking a large sum of money because of the near approach of the policeman), but worse than that—they had stolen his false teeth—his "uppers and unders," thus disabling him from speaking so that he could be understood any better than a hog, besides leaving his face with a sorrowfully comical look on it, with his nose and chin coming as near together as those of old Punch himself.

The police put him in a carriage and sent him home, while detectives went out in search of the thieves, but if the Old Man had been in his right senses he never would have consented to be taken home.

To a hospital, rather, where he could lay off, out of sight and sound, until his fluffy jaws could be dis tended again with new teeth.

But he was not only broken up, but he was sick—very sick.

It was an experience he had never had before. It was one he had never even read of.

The idea of seizing a man and robbing him of his false teeth, simply for the gold plates on which they were set (for of course they would not fit anybody else), was not only very painful, but decidedly new to him.

Yes, he was so sick that he scarcely knew where he was being taken to. Indeed, he didn't care. He only wished—if he wished at all—that he might be taken to the morgue, there to await identification, which he felt would never happen in the world, and he was right, for he looked no more like himself than he did like a cigar store sign.

"Oh, I wish I was dead!" he moaned, as he was being whirled along. "It would be much better for me if I was under the sod out of the way, for I am an unfortunate man at best. Something is continually happening to me. I am either too good or too bad for

this world, and I think the best caper would be for me to get out of it altogether. Ah! woe is me!"

Thus he cogitated, lost to everything but his own misery and general misfortune.

It was now past six o'clock, and the assembled family was waiting dinner for him.

But he thought not of dinner; he simply wanted to die.

The carriage stopped, and glancing out, he recognized his home.

And still without thinking of the consequences, and wanting either to die or have a large tap of sympathy turned on for him, he paid the driver and made his way up the front stoop.

He finally found his night-key and let himself in, but without stopping to divest himself of his overcoat, he flung aside his hat in the entry and made his way to the general dining-room, mad and dejected almost beyond the measure of endurance.

As before stated, the entire Shorty family was there. They had become tired of waiting and gathered around the table.

Ginger was assisting them to the first course as the Old Man opened the door and appeared before them.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Shorty, and the whole family rose to their feet in alarm.

"What is it?" asked the Kid.

"Who are you, sir?" demanded Angie, the astonished wife of his lacerated bosom.

"Mamma, shall I go for the gun?" asked his son.

"What do you want—how came you here?" demanded Shorty, who was in reality the only one who recognized the old wayfarer.

He knew him by the baldness of his head and his general build.

"Soy, who are yer?" demanded the Kid, his grandson.

And he might have endured even this without attempting to speak if Ginger had not grabbed him by the coat collar.

"Come, now, you wants ter mosey right outen heah!" he cried, and started to run him.

"Muff—nuf—shuf—oh, smell!" or sounds to that effect escaped the Old Man, as he struggled against the darky.

"Oh, lie certainly must be a lunatic that has escaped from somewhere. Ring for a policeman," said Shorty's wife.

"No, shoot holes in him!" said Peter Pad.

"Yes, let's have some fun with him," the kid of the Kid added, with enthusiasm.

"Shun—nuf—my—hi—whuff—"

"Dat settles it!" said the Kid, and without further palaver he made a rush for the messenger call to ring up a policeman.

In his agony the poor Old Man gazed imploringly from one to another. He made his empty chops go, but failed to utter a word that anybody seemed to recognize.

Then, as a last resort, he rushed over to where his wife stood trembling, and attempted to appeal to her.

But she screamed, and his little son, brave as a lion and coming to his mother's rescue, seized a fork and jabbed it deeply into him, while Pete and Ed flung plates and cups at him, one of them containing some very hot tea.

That was a nice racket, and the Old Man was only out of the frying-pan to get into the fire most unmistakably.

"Take him away!" shouted his wife.

"Seize him, Ginger!" cried the Kid's wife; and not only did those kids keep up the battle they had begun, but the house-dog got in, and began to gnaw the Old Man's leg.

Of course he yelled for quarter, but those kids were not disposed to give him half a chance.

Ginger seized him again, and the Old Man knocked Ginger down.

"Mush—fush—lush—muf!" he roared.

"Sic him, Touser!" cried young Cal, who was making a brave fight for his mother, and again he jabbed him with a fork.

"Oh, here you are, pop! Shoot a hole in him!" cried Peter, who had rushed up-stairs and brought down the very rifle that had once before occasioned so much trouble.

Shorty took the rifle, and the Old Man fell on his knees.

"Shoot him!" cried Cal, an idea in which they all joined.

"Here comes der cop!" said the Kid, just then returning to the room.

"Oh, what a relief!" said the wives.

"How did he get into the house?"

The Old Man saw the trouble, but he was powerless to avoid it.

The policeman followed the Kid into the room.

"Seize him!" cried the wives.

"Slug him!" echoed the kids, who were having the largest kind of a circus.

"Who are you, and what are you doing here?" demanded the officer, snatching him to his feet.

The excitement was a hundred degrees above the freezing point.

In utter desperation the Old Man pulled out a key—a peculiar night-key, which they all at once recognized as belonging only to grown members of the family—and held it up.

They all started.

"Juf—nuf—ny—mush!" or sounds to that effect escaped the Old Man as he did so.

"Bad man, where did you get that key? It belongs to my husband! Where is he?" demanded the Old Man's wife.

"Hee—muf—me!" he replied, angrily, at the same time smiting his breast.

"What?" they all exclaimed, as though they half comprehended his meaning.

"Is he drunk, or can't he talk?" asked the puzzled officer.

"Club him!" cried little Cal.

"Shoot him, pop," said Peter Pad.

"Wait a moment. Can you write?" asked the Kid's wife, feeling that there was some great mistake being made.

The Old Man nodded, and she produced a writing-pad and pencil, while the whole group gathered around the table at which he sat.

He wrote rapidly for a moment, and then handed it to Shorty.

He read it aloud:

"Don't you fools know me? I am your father—Josiah Burwick. I have been robbed of my teeth, and cannot talk."

"What?" they all exclaimed.

"Do you pretend to tell me that you are Josiah Burwick?" demanded his wife, for to save her life she did not know him.

The old man nodded energetically.

"Come off!" cried the Kid.

"Too thin I!" added Shorty.

"Slug him!" chorused the Kids.

"I guess you are an old fraud," said the officer, "and the oest thing I can do is to take you in."

"Bully!" exclaimed the boys.

"Nough-my-nuff-os-wosh—"

"Take him away! he is a lunatic," said Shorty, interrupting him.

"Wait a moment," said Shorty's wife, who had been reading the Old Man's written protest. "This handwriting is your father's," and the Old Man got in some more of his vocal splutter.

"What is that?" and the other wives examined it.

"Why, yes, don't you know him?" asked the Kid's wife, gleefully.

"How?"

"Look at his bald head—that whole face above the nose—yes, it is, it is old pop!" she added, throwing her arms about his neck.

There was a tableau for you!

"Youf!" grunted the Old Man, getting as near to "yes" as he possibly could, and then seizing the pencil again, he began to write.

Shorty led the officer out of the room, put a five-dollar note in his hand, and told him to go and say nothing, that it was all right.

Again they read what he had written.

"I was waylaid and robbed of my watch and teeth. The police are hunting for the rascals."

They all began to see it now, and while little Cal scud for cover, his mother began to apologize and commiserate, as did the other two wives, who had been so deceived by his remarkably altered appearance.

Even the Kid had been deceived, and it wasn't until after he got a wink from his father, Shorty, that he tumbled. It was remarkable even then, for he had never seen him without his false teeth, as had none of the other members of the family.

"Well, you are a nice old ham, aren't you?" asked Shorty, sneeringly.

"Now you stop, George Burwick. Any man is liable to be waylaid and robbed here in this wicked city, and it is wrong of you to catechise him when he cannot reply," said his wife, resolutely taking his part.

"Isn't he a beauty?" exclaimed the Kid. "Soy, his nose an' chin would make a good nut cracker."

"His nose is all right, but don't you talk about chin. Come, Josiah, come up-stairs," she added, taking him by the arm kindly.

Shorty and the Kid laughed, as did Pete and Ed. How could they help it?

But the Old Man was very sore, and as his wife led him from the dining-room he turned and shook his fist at them.

This, of course, did not lessen the laughter, and as the door was about to close after them the tormenting Kid cried out: "Give us a speech, dad! Tell us all about it!"

"Both of you should be ashamed of yourselves!" protested the Kid's wife. "He is one of the nicest men that ever lived, and nobody but cruel wretches would ever laugh at his misfortunes."

This showed how the Old Man stood at home.

But it was too great a snap for Shorty and the Kid to keep sober over, and so, after hurrying through with their meal, they went up-stairs to the billiard-room, where they laughed until their sides were sore.

"Where's all dat ever happened before?" asked the Kid.

"Nowhere!"

"What is his nibs?"

"The boss!"

"Shake!"

They shook.

"What should we do without him?"

"Dry up with ther blues!"

"Right! Shake some more!"

They shook.

And for two hours they sat there smoking and laughing over the misfortune that had so unexpectedly overtaken the Old Man.

They knew little or nothing of the particulars, but they felt certain that it all came from his freshness and curiosity.

Then they concluded to go down to the station-house and see if they could learn any additional particulars.

Of course the Old Man didn't want any supper, save what he could take through a straw, but his faithful little wife stood close up to him, like the true woman she was, and made him as comfortable as circum-

tances would permit, seconded in her efforts by the other two wives.

As for those kids, while Ginger was bathing his swollen (not black) eye, they assembled stealthily in Peter's room, and there laughed over the matter and pounded each other in their exuberance until they were tired and sore.

The Old Man gave his sympathizers the full particulars, in writing, of what had so unexpectedly befallen him, and at the same time informed them that he could never, no never, forgive Shorty and the Kid for laughing at him in the way they did, while he retained in his own mind the secret of a certain short, sweet programme he would carry out in good time for the benefit of his son Cal.

Meanwhile Shorty and the Kid were on their way to the station-house.

They were anxious to know if the rascals who had robbed their bald-headed parent had been caught. Not that they cared so much for the watch, although it was a valuable one, but there were not the possibilities of so much fun in it as there would be with the teeth. Curiously enough, who should be at the desk but Sergeant Polly, Shorty's old friend; the man who took an interest in him and put him into the minstrel business years ago.

They had not seen each other in years, and the meeting between them was of the most cordial character.

"But what brings you here, Shorty?" asked the sergeant, after they had talked over old times for a while.

Shorty told him the story.

"We've got them. Brought in not more than an hour ago," said he.

"And ther hash-chewers?" asked Shorty.

"Got them all right, also the watch."

Nothing in the world, except the saving of his father's life, could have pleased Shorty more, and after agreeing that the Old Man should appear upon a certain time to swear against the rascals, he went with his whole heart into something else.

A large soap-box was procured, and also a big lot of wrapping paper, and for the next two hours Shorty and the Kid were busily employed in a back room, into which the sergeant occasionally came to see how things were going on.

"Ah! you are the same old Shorty that you used to be!" he would say, and at the same time he enjoyed the racket he was working just as well as he had done years ago.

Well, it was nearly midnight when they parted, and the two runty jokers left the old sergeant with certain instructions and a grin on his face that was good to see.

Without a word of explanation to their wives, and the wives had long ago learned not to expect such a thing when they were out late, Shorty and the Kid retired.

But it would have been a study for an artist if he could have seen the mugs of that pair of jokers as they lingered between waking and sleeping.

Sleep, however, held them long the following morning, as it did all other members of the family, with the exception of the Old Man. He didn't sleep much.

It must have been seven o'clock in the wan light of the next day when there was a healthy pulling at the front door bell of the Burwick mansion.

Ginger, with his swollen nose, responded, all the while saying to himself that he would break up this Shorty family by leaving it, as he had often threatened to do before.

He found a messenger boy at the door with a big box, directed to Mr. Josiah Burwick.

As there were no charges to pay on it, Ginger concluded to take it, all the while saying to himself that he had stood this sort of a thing just as long as he intended to.

He took it up-stairs to the Old Man's rooms, rapped at the door until he got a response, and then walked away before anybody appeared, saying to himself that he would burst the whole thing up.

The Old Man had been up some time, as before stated, and he presently opened the door before which the box stood.

He turned it carefully over and saw that it was addressed to him. He took it into the room and looked it over. Then he called to his wife for her opinion.

"Oh, Josiah, it may be dynamite!" said she, in her night-dress. "Where did it come from?"

He explained to her in pantomime.

"I am afraid," she protested.

"Of what?" he would have said if he could, but she understood his gestures as before.

"It may be some cruel thing by the man who robbed you."

But the gestures of the Old Man showed her that he was not afraid, if, indeed, he did not really wish that something would happen that would knock him out. "Oh, this is too much!" she cried, and running to little Cal's crib, she snatched him out of it and out of a sound sleep, and run into the front room.

But the Old Man not only wished to show her that he was afraid of nothing that human fiends could concoct, but he wanted to win her respect over again for undoubted bravery.

She sighed: she waited and listened, while little Cal fell asleep again, not even stopping to think what had happened.

Finally, in sheer desperation she placed the boy on a sofa and stole on tip-toe back to their sleeping apartments.

The Old Man had, in the meantime, opened the box and lifted out a large bundle.

It seemed to be composed of paper, and he began to open its folds. He opened and he opened. Wrapper after wrapper did he undo without coming to the contents, yet all the while the bundle grew smaller.

The floor was covered with paper, and the room began to look like a newspaper-office. Still he worked on.

Finally the package got so reduced that it was no larger than a base-ball, but he took off three more wrappings, when, lo! there were his watch and false teeth.

His wife came in just at that moment, and in his joy he sputtered something.

"In Heaven's name, Josiah, what is it?" she demanded, anxiously.

"Mum—yum—yah!" he mumbled, while holding the teeth under a stream of water.

"Tell me, Josiah, what is it?"

"Oh, that's all right, Angie," said he, in the meantime having put his uppers and unders in position, which not only enabled him to speak as usual, but made him look as natural as ever again.

"Oh, Josiah!" she exclaimed.

"Oh, Angie!" and the next thing they were in a mutual embrace.

CHAPTER IX.

NEVER in the most palmy and rollicksome days of the old time did the Old Man's face bear such a big smile as it did when he went down to meet the family at breakfast that morning.

He had his watch. He had his teeth, and, altogether, he never looked better in his life.

He could talk. He could express himself as of yore, and that alone was enough to make him supremely happy.

The entire family met as usual, but Shorty and the Kid did not appear to be so very happy.

They knew all about it, but were sourly disposed to chaff the Old Man, who was wearing the largest smile of anybody.

"It is all right. The police in New York can certainly be called 'the finest,' for inside of twelve hours they restored to me all my lost property. What is the matter with you fellows?" he asked, after a pause, turning to Shorty and the Kid.

"Oh, nothing, if disgrace is nothing," said Shorty, tackling his breakfast.

"Soy, pop, yer've broke up der whole household," said the Kid.

"Me? How?"

"Oh, rest! Let us eat another meal in peace," said Shorty.

"What do you mean?" the Old Man demanded.

"Mean! Why, how about last night, when we had ter call a cop all on your account? Soy, yer worse than ther original of 'my awful dad,' and I'd like ter swap yer," said Shorty.

"You would! What for?"

"A sheep," replied Shorty.

"Or a second-hand pump."

"Or some cold clam chowder. Say!"

"What?" asked the Old Man.

"I'm sorry you recovered your teeth."

"Why so?"

"Cause you can talk again."

"Oh, that is too bad," said the wives.

"Yes, that's what I say—too bad that he ever found 'em," growled Shorty.

"This from you, my eldest son!" exclaimed the Old Man, pathetically.

"Did you hear me?"

"Well?"

"Soy, does yer foller his nibs?" asked the Kid, severely.

"Do what?"

"Keep der connection."

"With what—about what?"

"Oh, come off!" put in Shorty.

"Off what?" the Old Man asked, his astonishment growing all the while.

"Oh, off the subject. You're bad. You're worse than my awful dad in the play."

He glanced at the wives.

They looked very solemn.

"Oh, that is all right. Such accidents are liable to happen anybody in these days of depravity. But you fellows are trying to make too much out of it," said he.

"Too much! What's a blighted hearthstone?" demanded Shorty.

"A broken home!" said the Kid's wife.

"A shattered shrine!" added Shorty's wife.

"A what?" exclaimed the Old Man.

"A broken social community."

"Well, I'll be broken up if I know what you are all driving at. I tell you it was all an accident—a thing that might happen to anybody," he protested.

"Anybody

"Sar, I amn't a grinnin'," said Ginger, and he tried to look as though he wasn't.

"You lie, you big hunk of India rubber!" the Old Man roared again.

"No, sah."

"Then why in thunder don't you shut up that old trap of yours?"

"M—my trap am shut, sah," he replied, meekly.

"No, sir! No, you black rascal! You are laughing at me—me, sir; me!" and he rushed upon the unfortunate coon like a veritable bull of Busham.

Ginger had been there before.

He dodged.

And the Old Man clawed the atmosphere in manifesting his wrath.

"Sah, you is mistaken," said Ginger.

"You lie, you villain! you lie!" and he made another break for Ginger.

But Ginger was fly once more and kept out of reach, all the while protesting that he had done nothing wrong.

Finally, however, the Old Man's wind began to get low, and he stopped to blow.

"I—I's your friend, sah. I neber done nuffin agin you, sah. I—"

"G—Ginger, I—I—you are a fool."

"Yes, sah!"

"So be I, Ginger."

"Yes, sah."

"What! Don't you dare tell me that!"

"No, sah."

"My sons are ungrateful."

"Yes, sah."

"They have the laugh on me."

"Yes, sah."

"Even my wife laughs."

"Yes, sah."

"Ginger?"

"Yes, sah."

"That is too much. When the wife of my bosom laughs at my mishaps, and the child of my old age catches on and helps along the concatenation, I am done."

"Yes, sah," said Ginger, although he hadn't the slightest idea what the big word meant.

"Ginger, I sometimes think that I have lived long enough," he said, after a pause.

"Yes, sah, shouldn't wonder."

"I have half a mind to shuffle."

"What?"

"To shuffle off this mortal coil, and go to that bourne from whence no traveler e'er returns, Ginger."

"If you is ready, let her go," said Ginger, still without knowing what he meant.

"Ginger, if I am missed, look for me in the garret," said he, in a whisper.

"Yes, sah."

"And tell them all that I died of grief; that I was unappreciated, and am glad to be at rest, good Ginger."

"Yes, sah, an' dat will give us all a rest," said Ginger.

"Ah! then they will miss me. Then my sons and the wife of my bosom will not laugh at me or guy my misfortunes. Yes, Ginger, if I should be missed, look for me in the garret," and as he said so he brushed away a tear, a real moist one, and, struggling with his emotions, he strode from the room, leaving Ginger looking after him and somewhat aghast.

"By Golly, de Ole Man am off he's nut, fo' shuah!" he mused, after being left alone. "Wonder if he will bust herself?"

He lost no time in reporting the case to Shorty and the Kid. They instantly swapped winks.

"Dar's somefin de matter wid him, fo' shuah," he said, with much earnestness.

"Gone to climb the golden stairs, eh?"

"Fo' shuah."

"All right. Now keep quiet. Which way did he go?" asked Shorty.

"Gwine right up-stairs to de garret."

"That's all cheese. Wait."

The Kid was dancing with delight, for he evidently knew there was fun up, so he and Shorty took charge of it.

In the course of half an hour Ginger went up to the attic and looked in.

The Old Man had evidently made up his mind to wring the hearts of his family, but at the same time not to wring his own neck.

He knew that Ginger would be the first one to be worried, and so he arranged through him to give the family a terrible scare. But Shorty and the Kid had posted everybody, and they were prepared for what followed.

Ginger looked into the room. There was the Old Man, seemingly hanging by the neck, his tongue run out of his mouth, and also seemingly dead.

Ginger was startled a little at the apparition, but he gave no loud alarm. He simply retreated and beckoned to Shorty, who in turn beckoned to the other members of the family.

"Now, then!" mused the Old Man, and knowing that all hands would soon be up to see him, he made his face look even more ghastly and death-like than before, if possible.

Shorty, the Kid, all three of the wives, and the three little kids filed slowly into the room, but the Old Man was sorely disappointed because there was no exclamations of sorrow and horror.

They ranged themselves around the wanted to be supposed suicide, and he was doing his best to look dead.

"So his nibs has shuffled, hey?" said Shorty.

"The old fool!" exclaimed Mrs. Josiah. "What did he want to do that for? Only to think we shall have to have the coroner here and all that bother. Why didn't he go somewhere and drown himself?"

"Oh, he was an old crank, anyhow, an' wanted ter make us all der trouble he could," said the Kid, and they could see that the Old Man was getting red in the face with anger.

"Won't we give him a bully funeral!" said little Peter Pad, and the other two agreed.

"He won't spank me any more," said Cal.

"Poor old man!" said Shorty's wife.

"Poor old fool! What did he want to put me into mourning for when I have just got my spring clothes engaged?" said his wife.

"Soy, shall we cut him down?" asked the Kid of Shorty.

"No; let him hang till the coroner comes. It won't do him any harm. Come, let's go down and ring for a policeman."

This being agreed to, they all marched out of the room, rushed down-stairs, and had their laugh out where the suicide could not hear.

But the moment they had gone the Old Man threw off the rope that had been around his neck and struck an attitude. It was one that represented disappointment and indignation.

He had never been so broken up in his life.

"The ingrates—the fiends!" he exclaimed. "Even the wife of my bosom is not sorry. Oh, this is dreadful!" and he threw himself into an old chair and wished that he was in reality dead. Indeed, he now seriously contemplated making a clean job of it and really pegging out. "Oh, that I was indeed a stiff!" he moaned.

He felt very bad, of course, for he thought that he had really seemed dead to them, and the least he could expect was that an officer and a coroner would soon arrive.

But he waited an hour and no one came. He waited two hours with a like result. Then he got madder than ever, and made a break for down-stairs, resolved on being a terror.

He found the family all congregated in the reception-room, not the least excited, but calmly engaged on preparing for the holidays, now very near at hand. Nor did a single one of them appear surprised at his coming.

"Josiah, we are arranging for the holidays," said his wife, with animation. "Have you any suggestions to make?"

"Yes, dad, give us an idea," said Shorty.

"My idea is that you can all go to thunder!" roared the Old Man, and after bestowing a withering look upon each in turn, he rushed wildly from the room, followed by a loud laugh.

Many times and oft in the Old Man's life had he been mad, but now he was red-hot and no mistake. He hated everybody, and especially his wife and little Cal.

Christmas presents, indeed!

Not a cent's worth would any member of the family get out of him, and what was more, he would not live in the same house with any of them. He would fly forever.

Acting under this impulse of indignation, he rushed for a gripsack, jammed a lot of shirts and collars into it, took a few other necessities, and then bolted from the house.

The three little kids were looking out of an upper window as he went down the front stoop, and they grieved him unmercifully.

"There goes the corpse!"

"See the walking stiff!"

"Good-bye, pop. Come around and give us another circus some time, won't yer?"

But the Old Man paid no attention to them, keeping on his way for a Broadway car.

He knew now that he had made an ass of himself, as usual, and from the laugh he had heard, and the chaffing of the kids, he knew that none of them had regarded him as dead, and for the hundredth time, as he rode down-town, he swore never to attempt any funny business again.

He went to the Fifth Avenue Hotel, as usual, and was shown to a room, resolving to stay there the remainder of his life, for the whole business had simply shown him up in a ridiculous light; he didn't feel like returning home again, where he knew he would be treated to chaff.

One day and a night he stayed, but no one of his family called. Another night and a day, and yet nobody inquired for him. Then he thought of telegraphing to Shorty to come to him; but this would only be another weakening.

Finally he began to get mad again, but this time the other way. He had stood that sort of a thing as long as he could, and now he would arise and go to his mansion, where he would assert himself, and even become a tyrant, if needs be. He had been made a fool of long enough.

It was Christmas Eve when this resolution finally got the upper hold of him. He saw the bright light and happy faces; he heard the merry laughs, and it made him more lonesome and homesick than ever. He wanted to go home, but he was as yet too mad to wish to take any part in home festivities.

But the impulse was on him, and so he packed his grip again and started for home.

It was a tough pill to swallow, and he never could have downed it had it not been for his indignation. The idea of making everybody sorry—of becoming a household tyrant—was what nerved him to the performance.

On approaching the house he saw that it was brightly lighted from top to bottom, but he had no notion of investigating it. He would let himself in without disturbing anybody, and go directly to his own private chamber, where he would wait until the festivities of the night and the following day were over before he asserted himself.

This he succeeded in doing in part, but Shorty saw

him sneaking up-stairs with his gripsack, and instantly knew that the Old Man had weakened.

There was a family council held at once, but the kids by this time had been sent to bed, so as not to interfere with the visits of Santa Claus.

The return of the Old Man was funny to everybody but his wife. She felt ashamed and indignant at the conduct of the old fool, and wanted to punish him in such a way as to cure his crankiness.

She would have left the house and gone somewhere for a few days, only her heart was in the coming festivities, and so she finally concluded to fall in with an original idea of Shorty's, which would be pretty sure to make the Old Man sick.

Ginger was ordered to pipe the Old Man off, and report what he was doing, and in the course of an hour or so he informed them that he had gone to bed.

This was just what they wanted the old pouter to do, and so they at once commenced to carry out their proposed rocket.

Yes, the Old Man had gone to his own bed, mad and sulky clear through, for not one of the family had shown up, although by that time his wife should have returned to their floor for the night, it being then one o'clock.

Finally he heard her come to the door that divided their private chambers and lock it.

This made him mad enough to kick himself all around the room, but he restrained himself with an effort, and, finally, about three o'clock on Christmas morning, he fell asleep for good, forgetting all his trouble.

How long it was afterward I will not say when two stout men, one of whom carried a long bag, stole into his room.

The Old Man was snoring like a bagpipe, oblivious to everything, even to the music he made.

Those two men wore masks.

Were they robbers?

We shall see.

The gas was burning low, and they turned it up to get their bearings.

The chamber was beautifully furnished, and among other novelties there stood in one of the chimney corners a large tripod, such as we often see in gardens, with a pot of flowers so arranged as to represent an iron pot boiling over a fire. A pot of artificial flowers hung there now.

They took off that iron pot and set it aside, then they threw the bed clothes off and proceeded to encase the Old Man in this stout bag that reached fully to his chin, where they tied it and made him a complete prisoner.

But before doing this they had chloroformed him into utter insensibility, and to such an extent that it would last him for an hour, and then they proceeded to lift him out of bed and suspend him in the place of the flower pot, although it made the tripod creak.

An hour later the Old Man came to his senses, but he couldn't understand where he was at all. Daylight was streaming in at the windows—his bed was vacant, where was he?

Then he began to kick, finally to yell and call for help, nearly crazy over the situation.

He yelled, and that was a signal, for presently the whole family came rushing into the room.

"What is it?" they all exclaimed.

"Let's see," said Shorty, and turning around a card that was fastened to his back, he read:

"A CHRISTMAS PRESENT FOR LITTLE CALIFORNIA."

"Mercy!" they all exclaimed, in chorus.

"Lemme go, confound you!" roared the Old Man.

"What a Christmas present! Why, it's my pop!" said Cal, and then they all pretended to be astonished, and exclaimed, "What?"

"Confound you all, this is a trick on me!"

"Oh, he has hung himself again," said his wife.

"That be-hanged! How came I here?"

"How should I know? It is the first I have seen of you for several days," said she.

"I say, dad, are you off your nut?"

"I should think I would be. Such outrages were never heard of before. Help me down or I will murder somebody!" he roared.

After a laugh, with the assistance of Ginger they finally got him safely down and out of the bag, but a wilder looking man was never seen. A great trick had been played on him, he felt sure, but how had it been consummated?

CHAPTER X.

"WELL, you are a nice man, aren't you? a nice husband and father?" said old Josiah Burwick's wife, after they had released him from the bag and tripod in which he had been so mysteriously adjusted that Christmas morning.

"Oh, soy, he's off his chump," said the Kid.

"Clean gone. No good any more."

"Where's my Christmas present?" asked little Cal.

"There it is; take it away," said his mother, contemptuously, and then the other members of the family laughed, even to Ginger.

The Old

It was one of the greatest mysteries he had ever attempted to wrestle with. That there was a joke somewhere he verily believed, but where, in the name of goodness, was it?

He finally concluded that he would not go down and meet the family at breakfast, even if it was Christmas morning, so he rang the bell for his servant to order breakfast in his own room.

Shorty suspected what he would do, and so was ready for him, knowing that he must be badly broken up, and knowing, also, what the favorite remedy for it consisted of.

So, when the bell rang, he took up a tray on which there was a brandy cocktail and started for his chamber, followed by the Kid with another.

Shorty rapped at the door.

"Come in," roared the Old Man, but no noise was

fluence of his libation, but still he could but remember and feel hurt.

The two jokers walked in to his room.

"What does all this mean?" he demanded.

"Oh, that's all right, dad, don't mention it."

"Why not?"

"Because you are not feeling well. You are slightly off, so don't talk about it."

"Confound you, what do you mean?" he roared, glancing from one to the other.

"Off, pop, way off," said the Kid, sadly.

"Off what?"

"Yer chump, sure."

"No, sir, I was never better or more level-headed in my life. I go away for a day or two and return only to be outraged. I demand to know who committed it," he thundered.

and knew nothing about it until I woke up and gave the alarm.

"Too thin, dad," said the Kid.

"Soy, don't tell their folks that story."

"But what shall I tell them?"

"Oh, say you did it yerself for a joke."

"Do you think they would believe it?" he asked, earnestly.

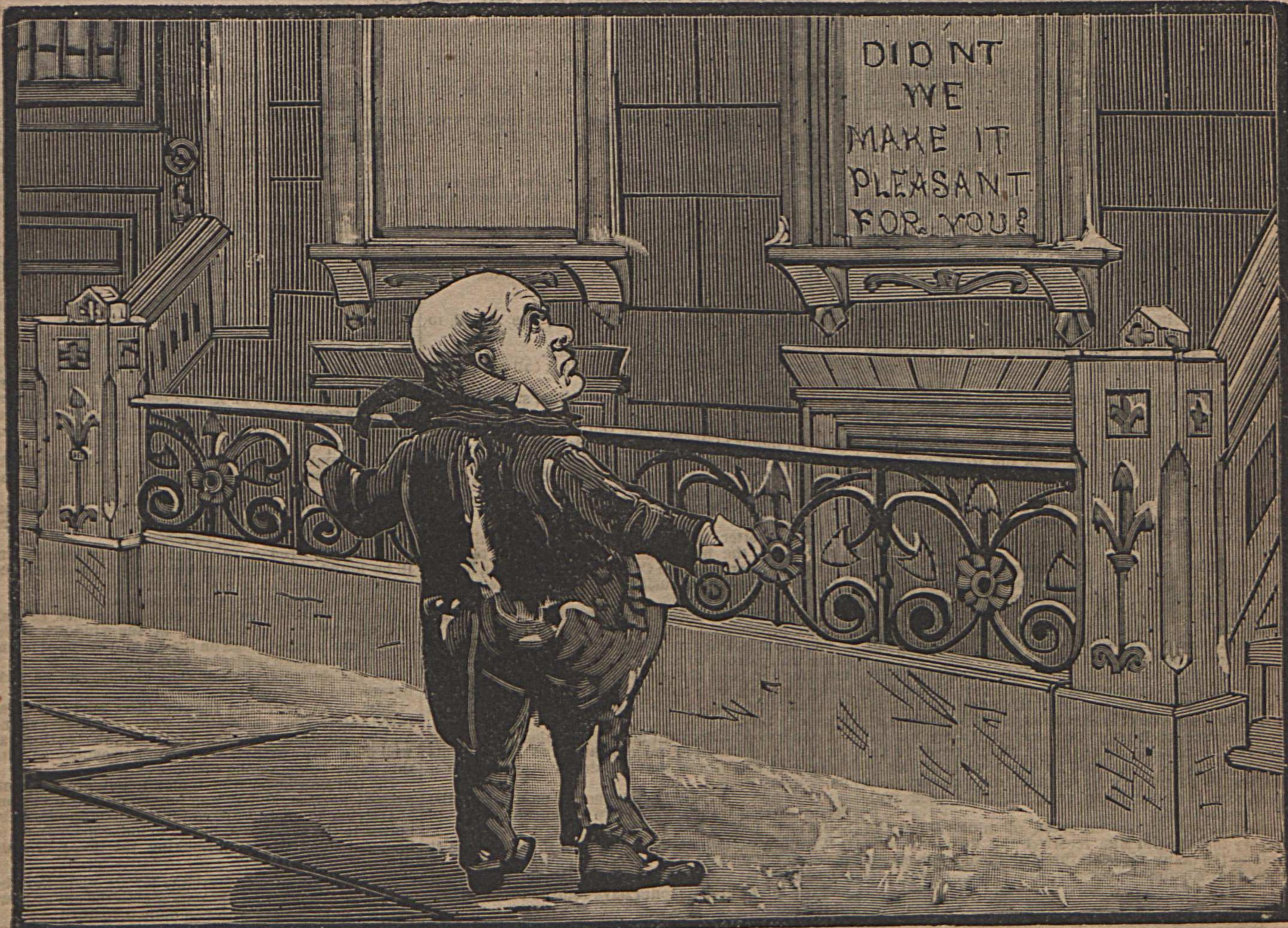
"Cert. Come down ter hash an' put on a grin. That'll make it all right."

"And you will help me out?"

"Cert. S'pose we would go back on our old pop? Guess not!"

"Come on, that'll be all right."

The Old Man hesitated a moment. He really did want to rejoin his family, and at the thinnest prospect



His swallow-tailed coat was ripped up the back and one tail missing; his trousers were ripped clear up to the knee, and there was nothing left of his hat but the rim. Regaining his feet, he looked up at the lighted windows of the house out of which he had been fired.

taken of it. "Come in, confound you!" he added, presently, but still no response.

This made the Old Man mad some more, and he dove for the door.

Throwing it open with a zip, there he beheld Shorty and the Kid, each bowing low before him.

He started back, but they did not move.

"What in thunder do you want?" he finally demanded; yet they moved not.

"Get out of here!" he roared, but instead of doing so they lifted the trays and looked comically imporing at him.

"Brought your breakfast, dad," said Shorty.

"Second course," added the Kid.

The Old Man was mad enough to kill them both, but Shorty had long ago taken his measure and knew just what would smooth out his wrinkles when he felt "rocky."

They held the cocktails toward him.

He looked first at them, then at the bearers.

Nothing, however, could have touched him nearer to his heart, and after hesitating a moment, something resembling a smile stole gradually over his fat mug, and he caught up the glass from Shorty's tray and drained it without a word.

"Second course, pop!" said the Kid, as he presented his libal offering.

The Old Man hesitated only a moment, and then surrounded the fragrant modicum with his plethoric person.

"How's that, dad?" asked Shorty.

"Touch der dry spot, pop?" queried the Kid.

The smile that had begun to bud on the Old Man's face had by this time nearly blossomed under the in-

Shorty and the Kid looked at each other and shook their heads solemnly.

This made him madder yet.

Shorty placed his forefinger alongside of his nose and the Kid tapped his own mug, as if to intimate that the Old Man was off his nut.

"Confound your pantomimic nonsense. How did I get into that bag, and who hung me in that tripod?" he demanded.

"How should we know? We heard you a whoopin' murder and shoutin' for help, and we rushed in and found you there. How should we know any more'n we did what you were doing up in the attic the other day?"

This was a teaser. It was the first thing that had been said to him on that subject, and he didn't know what to say in reply.

"Now, when yer come ter think of it, don't yer think yer off yer chump?" asked the Kid.

The Old Man winced.

"Don't you see?" put in Shorty.

"Oh, you be hanged. I want my breakfast sent up here right away," he added.

"What's ther matter with havin' it down in ther dinin'-room wid der gang?" asked the Kid.

"After all I've suffered? No, sir."

"Done it all yerself, dad."

"No, sir."

"Who helped yer?"

"Yes, who helped yer inter der tripod?"

"That's just what I'd like to know. But I believe you fellows know all about it."

"Did yer see us?"

"No, and that's the mystery of it. I saw nobody

he jumped, and together they all marched down into the dining-room.

There he was received with a blast of horns and a rattle of drums.

"Here comes my Christmas present, and you bet it's a good one!" said little Cal, and then there was more horn-blowing and laughter.

"Merry Christmas," said he, and then he went to his seat at the table.

The compliment of the season was returned by all save his wife, who never raised her eyes, and this cut him terribly.

However, the others made it pleasant for him, and the kids gathered around his chair and blew Christmas blasts in his ears.

"Merry Christmas, Mr. Burwick," said Ginger, through his swelled nose.

He would never have given vent to such a sentiment, had he not expected a present.

"That's all right, Ginger, but I want some breakfast fast."

"Yes, sah. Steak or chop?"

"Steak and chocolate."

"I should think you would want something bracing after your morning gymnastics," said Angie, his wife, and there was a laugh.

"Oh, that's all right. That was only a bit of fun to entertain the children," said he.

"Fun! Who helped you at it?" she asked.

"Nobody, that I know of."

"Done it all yourself?"

"Yes. Just a little fun, you know."

"Well, it certainly was funny if you could get into that sack and tie the string around your throat and

hang yourself up in the way we found you," which caused another laugh.

This made the Old Man silent, and he tackled his breakfast without another word. Indeed, he had never thought of the impossibility of the thing when he had taken Shorty's advice and come down to meet the family.

The laugh went around right heartily, but he did not join in it. He kept his eyes on his grub and went for it amid the hilarity, not even noticing the trumpetings of the kids.

Of course they all knew about the racket, but he did not, and as he ate he tried to think how the thing could have happened anyway.

But after enduring the laughter and the chaffing for nearly an hour, breakfast was at length finished, and they all rose to depart.

"Come up to the billiard-room," said the Old Man, aside, to Shorty.

"All right," and they started.

"Josiah Burwick, I wish to see you in our room," said his wife, severely.

"Oh, certainly, my dear," he replied, although he would have gladly put off the meeting for a few hours.

But he meekly followed her up-stairs, where she proceeded to go for him just red hot.

Such a lecture as it was, and he hadn't a word to say in his own defense, for she held the mirror up to several of his late escapades wherein he showed to very bad advantage.

But she finally ended it by assuring him that he was altogether too fresh; that an old man like him had no business to attempt such things as practical jokes; that he should set examples of sobriety to younger members of the family, and beware of the machinations of his son George, and his grandson Charles, to all of which he solemnly agreed.

Well, after receiving this lecture he joined Shorty and the Kid in the billiard-room and there received more chaff. Then he met the kids and romped with them for quite a while, enjoying their Christmas monkeying, and, on the whole, having a very good time.

But the Old Man was bound to make himself solid, let what would happen. He knew he had made an ass of himself, and he was bent on making good.

And he succeeded in doing so, remaining at home with the kids while Shorty took the wives out for a drive, and when evening came he took the youngsters to see a pantomime.

So Christmas passed in all its joyousness in spite of the way it began, and once more the Old Man was solid at home, although his wife kept an eye on him.

The holiday following Christmas in New York is of course New Year's, and during the week intervening Shorty and the Kid, while accepting many invitations themselves, contrived to work up a plan that would make the day pleasant for the Old Man, who is an enthusiastic caller as well as something of a masher for a man as old and bald as he is.

And during that week those kids drove everybody nearly wild with their pranks and the various modern contrivances for making adult life a burden, and before New Year's day came around the servants had all given notice of leaving on account of them, and all six of the parents vowed there should never be another Christmas recognized in the household, just as thousands of parents have said, and the very next year gone in as deeply as ever for giving their children a good time.

Well, it was during this week of mingled joy and misery that the Old Man received the following note among the many cards all three of them received for New Year's calls:

"Dec. 29.

"MR. BURWICK—Dear Sir: I receive on Jan. 1st, and shall be pleased to receive a call from you. I knew you in California. I am a widow now, on a visit to friends in New York, and shall assist several young ladies to receive their gentlemen friends, but no one will be more welcome than you.

"Truly yours,

"MRS. GRACIE BIRD.

"P.S.—Come, and we'll make it pleasant for you. No.—Lexington avenue."

The Old Man read it over twice, and then began to muse.

"Gracie—Gracie Bird; who can she be, I wonder? I don't remember her, at least by that name. Probably I knew her by her maiden name. So she has been married, and is now a widow, eh? Well, I should gradually work myself up into a smile if I didn't take that call in. Make it pleasant for me, eh? Well, well! I think Yours Truly will be perfectly willing. I'll make that my last call, sure. Make it pleasant for me, eh? Yum, yum, yum!"

The last three words he uttered aloud in his ecstasy, and both Shorty and the Kid, although they knew all about it, looked up in astonishment.

"Eh? What is it, dad?" asked Shorty.

"Got a mash, pop?" the Kid ventured.

"Nonsense! What is the matter with you fellows? The idea of an old man like me having a mash! No, I am glad to say I got over such things years ago. No, this is a note from an old California friend of mine, Dr. Bird."

"Dr. Bird? Is he going to receive calls?"

"Yes, just a few friends for a New Year's dinner; hence my exclamation," said he, soberly, at the same time pocketing the letter.

"Oh!" they both said, and so the matter dropped.

But it failed to drop out of the Old Man's mind, be assured, for the invitation had mashed him, and every now and then he would chuckle to himself, and say:

"Make it pleasant for me, eh?"

The best that money could buy did the Old Man encase himself in. A brand new full-dress suit of most faultless quality and cut, surmounted by a glossy plug, and everything to match, even to a delicate button-hole bouquet.

And, for that matter, both Shorty and the Kid were gotten up in much the same style, for all three of them were going to make calls in company.

They made their company calls, and got through before dark, after which they parted company, the Old Man retaining the family carriage to make his remaining calls with, especially that last and particular one on Lexington avenue, where he wished to create a sensation.

I encountered Shorty and the Kid on Broadway soon after, and by this time they were feeling first-rate.

"Hello, Petey, old man! Happy New Year!" they both exclaimed, seizing my either hand.

"A happy New Year and many returns to you both, dear boys," said I, in reply.

"Come inter der Hoffman House, ole man; must have a bot," said the Kid.

"A bot with Pete! Why, cert, every day in the year. Come along!"

And the flashily and stylishly-dressed little runts run me into that beautiful cafe whether I would or not.

"Made many calls?" I asked.

"Not many. Took in a few of the best. But, say, Pete, we want you to go along and see some fun at our next call. Happy New Year!"

"Happy New Year!"

"Happiness to you and yours! Well, where are you going to call next?" I added.

"Oh, hush, Pete! This is just in your line," said Shorty, seizing my hand.

"What is?"

"This call. Here, boy, call a hack," he added, to one of the waiters.

"That the call you meant?" I asked.

"Nixy, but that call will take us to a call where you will see some fun."

"All right. That is just in my line, sure enough. Whither away?"

"Lexington avenue. The Old Man will be there, and you ought to see how he's toggled."

"I shall be pleased to meet him. But by the expression of your roguish mugs I should say that there was mischief afloat," said I.

"Oh, hush! The Old Man's on the marsh."

"What?"

"Got a letter to call that has broken him all up," and Shorty, the little rascal, proceeded to tell me about the letter from the California widow, and before I knew it I was as enthusiastic as either of them to go and witness the result.

The waiter announced the carriage as in readiness, and we proceeded to enter it to make that call.

The snow had begun falling by this time, and everything was gauzed with white. Shorty gave the driver his direction, and the next minute we were rattling away up-town with merry voices ringing in our ears from all sides, for by this time festivities were at the apex of jollity.

I understood afterward how it was, that Shorty and the Kid had received no invitation to call at this place, and why it was that the driver stopped half a block away from it.

"He's just got there," said Shorty, pointing to the family carriage that stood before the house.

"Well?" I asked.

"We'll wait awhile, Pete, and see if they make it pleasant for the Old Man before we go in," said he.

The little fat rascal! If I had known as much then as I did afterward, I should have refused to make one of the party.

"Driver, get opposite of that carriage," said Shorty, addressing the snow-covered Jehu, and in a moment more we were so placed, still remaining in the carriage.

But scarcely had we thus located when angry voices met our ears, and it was evident that there was a rumpus inside.

I thought I knew the place—that it was a club-house of some sort, but was not certain.

The curtains were all down, but we could see the shadows of men and women flitting over them as they were doing something within, and the situation became interesting.

But we had only a moment to wait before the front door was pulled open, and a short, stout body hurled from it and kicked down the snowy front stoop, going bump, bump, bump clear down to the sidewalk, where it landed all in a heap.

"What's that?" I asked, but those two rascals were laughing to such an extent that they could not answer.

What in thunder was the meaning of it all, anyhow? Was that the Old Man?

While cogitating thus the figure that had been thus summarily thrown out pawed around in the snow a moment and then regained his feet.

Had not Shorty and the Kid been laughing so immoderately I should never have suspected that it was the Old Man, although about his size.

His swallow-tailed coat was ripped up the back and one tail missing; his trousers were ripped clear up to the knee, and there was nothing left of his hat but the rim.

Regaining his feet, he looked up at the lighted windows of the house out of which he had been fired. A painted card hung on one of the curtains, reading:

"Did not we make it pleasant for you?"

The victim gazed for a moment and then took a tumble.

Not such an one as he had taken only a moment before. He took this to himself, and making a dive for

his carriage, he yelled, "Home!" to the driver and disappeared.

I must say that I was angry, for I knew that the job had been put up on the Old Man, as many another one had before it.

The truth was, as I afterward learned, that this was, as I then suspected, a club-house, the home of a wild young men's club to which both Shorty and the Kid belonged, and they had put the job up on the Old Man, never stopping to think how rough it would be at that time in the evening on account of the New Year festivities.

I turned indignantly upon the jokers.

"Remember the scriptural anathema: 'With what measure ye give that shall be measured to you again,' or words to that effect. You have sons. Beware of the day when those kids shall meet you in practical play."

"Oh, dat's all right, Petey, ole man," said the Kid.

"We shall see," were my parting words.

CHAPTER XI.

NATURALLY enough, I followed up this New Year's racket on the Old Man Burwick, for I had come to regard him as a martyr to his sons, Shorty and the Kid.

It had been bad enough for him in the old time, but now there were three more torments for him, in the persons of those three kids, although they had nothing to do with the present snap. But I felt sorry for him, still knowing as I did that in nine cases out of ten he was to blame himself for all that happened him.

This was New Year's night, about ten o'clock, when the old victim was driven home, so utterly broken up that his coachman scarcely knew him, and he scarcely knew himself. He was not only being whirled homeward, but he was being whirled through a maze of doubt and wild uncertainty at the same time.

He could scarcely comprehend what had happened. He knew that he had called at the right number mentioned by the California widow; that he had been shown into the parlor by a colored servant, where there was a number of festive people of both sexes, having a regular old-fashioned New Year's good time.

He remembered of bowing his politest, and of being frowned upon for his pains.

He remembered that a big tall fellow came and asked him whom he had called upon, and of his telling him—"Mrs. Gracie Bird."

He remembered a grand laugh and a wild war-whoop that followed his explanation, and he heard somebody shout—"One, two, three!"

He remembered a rush, but only a little more, until he found himself going bumpety-bump down the front stoop, over the snow and into it.

Yes, one thing more he remembered.

He remembered pulling himself together, getting upon his feet, and looking up at the windows of the house, and seeing a sign on the curtain of one of them: " Didn't we make it pleasant for you?"

Oh, yes, he remembered that vividly, and he rode homeward thinking of it.

Now, it so happened that the three wives of these three interesting characters were receiving callers, and by this time the card basket in the parlor was well filled, my own and several others connected with this paper being among them.

The Old Man never was in luck to any great extent, even at his best, and it was proven on this occasion.

Arriving home, he ordered the coachman to take the horses to the stable, and began to make his way up to his front door, the snow making the task a delicate one.

But just as he was fumbling for his night-key the door was opened, and his wife was in the act of bowing out some callers who had done their turn.

The Old Man drew aside and the hilarious callers did not notice him, but he was not soon enough to escape the eye of his wife.

"Josiah Burwick, what on earth has happened to you?" she asked, as he entered the vestibule.

There was wine under his vest, and he felt certain that he could make himself solid on the question.

"Mercy, mercy, what has happened?" demanded the other two wives, who had come out of the parlor at the first exclamation.

"Come into the back parlor," said his wife, taking him by the arm. "Are you hurt?"

"All broken up," said he, with a sigh.

"Well, you look it. What happened you?" and there being no callers just then, the three wives gathered around him.

The Old Man tried to pull himself together, and glanced wildly from one to the other, while Ginger stood in the door, astounded and alarmed.

"Run over," said he, finally.

"How?"

"Horse car."

"A horse car?" they all exclaimed.

"Two."

"Two what?"

"Horse cars."

"One after the other?"

"No. Knocked from one track to another, and then knocked back again just in time to catch the next car."

"Well, I should think you had been run through a threshing machine," said Shorty's wife, laughing.

"Where did it happen?" asked the wife of his bosom, albeit somewhat suspicious that there was a sequel to his story.

"On Lexington avenue."

"Lexington avenue! Why, there are no horse cars on Lexington avenue."

"Sure enough," said the others.

"I guess it is a piece of that getting into the sack

and hanging yourself up in the tripod. And, Josiah, you have been drinking," she added.

"Course. Don't everybody drink on New Year's? Betcherlife—hic!"

"Where are George and Charles?"

"Give it up!"

"And you were alone when this happened to you—sure of that?" asked his wife—for she at once suspected that Shorty and the Kid had had a hand in it somehow.

"All alone?" mused the Old Man. "Not much. More'n twenty."

He remembered his reception.

"There is something strange about this, and I shall make it my business to find out what it is. Ginger, take Mr. Burwick up to his room, and telephone for Dr. Dough," she added.

"Yars'm," replied Ginger, who was having all he

So he was undressed (that is to say, what remained of his clothes were taken off) and put to bed, his bruises were rubbed with arnica, and a few strips of court-plaster were drawn over some skin abrasions.

And at midnight, after there were no more callers, after the lights were nearly all out, after Shorty and the Kid had returned from the day's festivities, the Old Man fell asleep and sweetly dreamed.

Sleep, oh, what a blessing!

It knits up the raveled sleeve of care and draws the charitable veil of forgetfulness over so many unwellcome experiences.

Big thing is sleep.

But it was time to sleep. Hushed were the toot horns of the kids; mellow was the chorus of the servants' snore, and the whole household passed gently into the land of forgetfulness, while the first day of the New Year died away into the

Year's," he remarked, as he went for the steak that Ginger had brought him.

"Oh, yes, especially when you go where they make it *pleasant* for you," said Shorty, quietly.

The Old Man pricked up his ears.

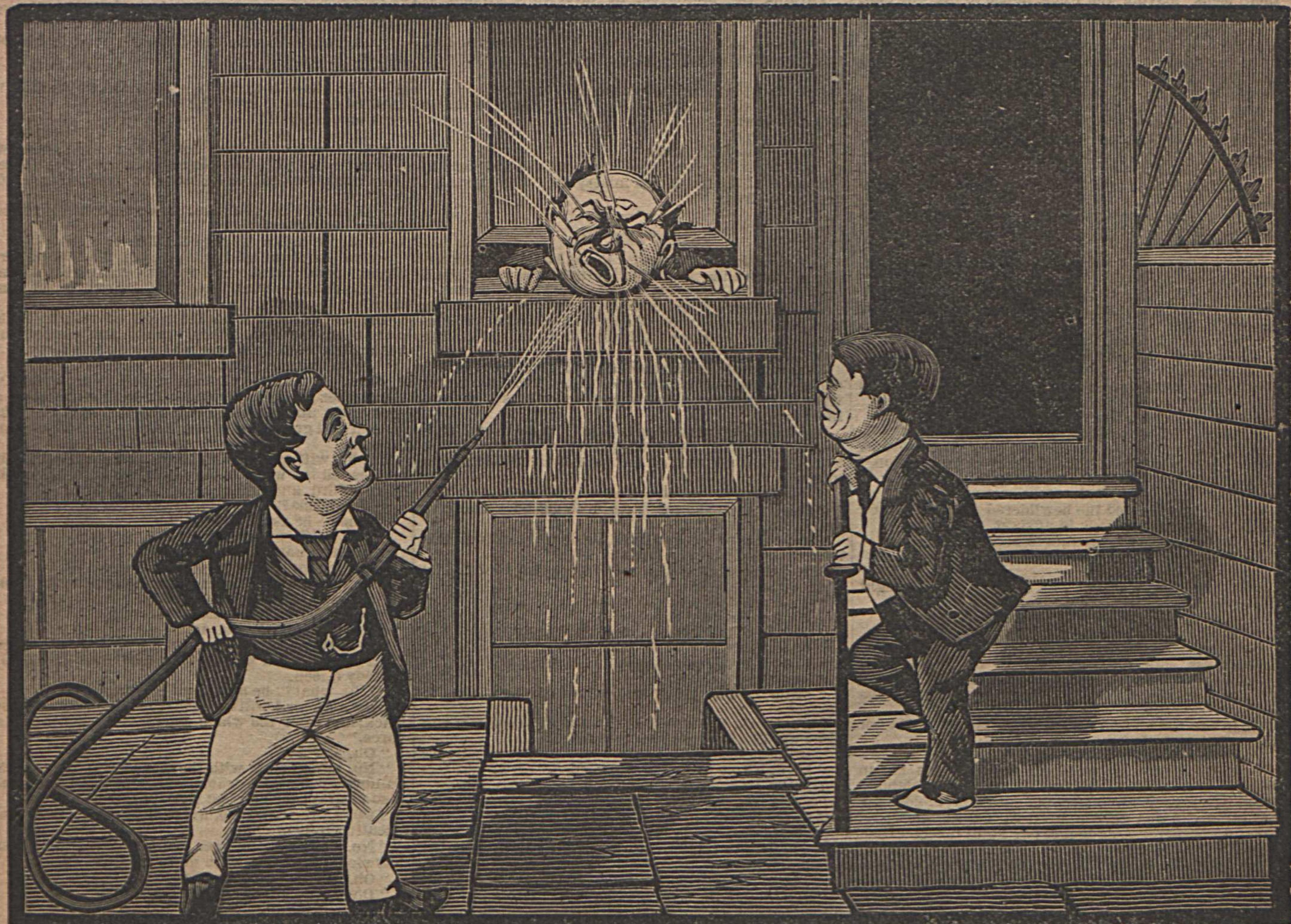
What the dickens did he mean by that?

Then there was some moments of silence, during which the Old Man kept his eyes on the steak he was wrestling with, and the three wives exchanged glances.

Shorty and the Kid did not even look up from the breakfast they were working at, while the Old Man, taking hope and thinking that perhaps it was only a chance remark, gradually waxed bold again and sought to get things on an even footing again.

"Yes, New Year's is a great social institution—"

"Especially when our friends make it *pleasant* for



Turning the stop-cock, he directed a stream of water full in his face, causing the Old Man to yell. "Give it to him!" cried the Kid. "Serves him right for doin' monkey business in the back winder. Go it!"

could do to keep the top of his head from flying back over his shoulders, so comical a sight was the Old Man, and so nicely was he avenged for that last smash in the nose.

"Shameful!" said she, as the wretched old victim followed Ginger from the room.

But Josiah had nothing to say. His first object had been to get into the house, into his room, and into a whole suit of clothes without being seen, but, failing in that, his greatest desire now was to get out of sight as soon as possible.

"Runned ober by a keer, hey?" queried Ginger, as they went slowly up-stairs.

"Yes, Ginger. Terrible accident."

"Yes. Look as though you had been habbin' some fun wid Sullivan."

"No nonsense, Ginger."

"I should say dar war no nonsense, sah."

"Never mind your comments. Hurry up and get Dr. Dough," said he, falling upon his couch.

"Yes, sah," said Ginger, and he hurried away to the telephone.

This was to call up the doctor, in order to see how badly broken up the Old Man really was on account of being run over by those horrid street cars.

Meantime the poor victim had gone to bed just as he fell upon it, and when the doctor reported for duty he and Ginger had to turn him over three or four times before he could be brought to his senses.

And then, after looking him all over, it was found that there were no bones broken. He was somewhat bruised and rather badly shaken up, but not seriously hurt.

arms of its successor, and the holiday became a memory only.

It was late the next morning when Ginger rang the rising-bell, and fully an hour afterward when the same bell summoned the family down to breakfast.

But in the meantime the Old Man had pulled himself together, and although he was a trifle stiff and sore, he managed to put in an appearance in the dining-room ahead of both Shorty and the Kid, although the three wives and the three kids were there.

Yet it was very much like the day after the Fourth of July, like an exploded fire-cracker, or the burst-out tube of a rocket that had gone up and done its duty—there wasn't much snap left.

The kids were sober (because they had to go back to school again), and the wives because they were tired of the whole thing, and the Old Man was only putting on a mask when he came down, pretending to be happy.

Shorty and the Kid came down soon after, but they were also glum, and it was all the wives could do to hurry breakfast into those three kids and get them off to school in time.

Then the wives and husbands were once more left alone. Ginger stood in waiting, but no word was spoken.

The situation became painful, and at last the Old Man, thinking to make himself solid, and to break up the monotony, made some pleasant remarks about the pleasures of the previous day.

Shorty and the Kid opened their eyes.

"Oh, it is a great social institution, this New

us," put in Shorty, but without looking up from his plate.

The Old Man opened his eyes again.

"Well, what's der matter with California widders?" asked the Kid, and yet he never looked up from the chop he was antagonizing.

The Old Man opened his eyes still wider, and the wives seemed to become even more interested than before, and after looking from one to the other, looked at Shorty and the Kid for an explanation.

Remember that the Old Man had tumbled hours ago that there had been a job of which he was the victim, and now he felt sure that his son and grandson knew all about it.

So he took a tumble now and said as little as possible and hurried through with his breakfast, hoping to get out of the way without anything further being said.

But just as he had finished the coachman came to the door and held out the Old Man's watch, hat in hand.

"Where did you find it?" asked Mrs. Josiah.

"In the coach this morning when I was cleaning it up," said he, respectfully.

"Oh, that's all right," said the Old Man. "I lost it last night. That's all right, but that's all right."

"Yes, that's a piece of being run over by several horse cars," said Mrs. Josiah, sneeringly.

"Horse cars!" exclaimed Shorty and the Kid.

"Yes, your poor father was run over by at least two horse cars last night on Lexington avenue. Look at him!"

"Poor man! They must have made it *pleasant* for

him," said Shorty.

"Oh, dem California widders!" said the Kid. The Old Man could bear no more, but, leaping to his feet, he rushed wildly from the room, leaving all but Shorty and the Kid in ignorance of what it meant.

But they never gave their good old dad away, although they continued to make life more or less of a burden for him by every now and then making some remark about making it pleasant.

Things, however, soon settled down in the Burwick mansion after the excitement and fiz of the holidays were over with. The kids returned to school again, and there wasn't more than one complaint a day from the neighbors regarding their mischievous pranks.

All things considered, times were again very peaceful at their home, partially perhaps because the sleighing was good, and Shorty and the Kid spent much of their time on the road, as did the kids with their sleds, leaving the whole house to the Old Man and Ginger.

Nothing happened for a month or more to disturb this harmony, by which time all old scores and memories had been obliterated, and Josiah's round fat face and bald head fairly shone with happiness and domestic bliss.

And there is no knowing how long this beautiful state of affairs might have continued, had it not been for the mischievousness of one of those Shorty kids, Little Peter Pad, I am sorry to say.

It came about in this way. It was a beautiful Saturday afternoon. The snow had slunk away into the North and East rivers through the sewers, the sun shone with a genial warmth, and the day was in all respects a spring one, as several had been before it.

Shorty and the Kid were out in the back yard looking at some crocuses that were pushing their heads above the soil, while Ginger was bossing around, very proud of the fact that he had got the earliest spring flowers in New York.

"They are too fresh, Ginger," suggested Shorty.

"How dat?" he asked.

"Too fresh."

"Fresh! Don want no salt on crocuses," replied Ginger, not fully understanding him.

"No, I mean they are too new."

"Pshaw! Crocuses too new! Shoo, go long!"

"No, no, you do not understand me. Your serious lack of perspicuity is suggestive of concatination," said Shorty, seriously.

"Cert," echoed the Kid.

"What!" exclaimed the bewildered coon, dropping his hoe and starting back in affright.

"Your obtuseness amounts to heptitudinosity."

"Of course it does," joined the Kid.

"Bees you sick?"

"No, but your crocuses will be the first cold night that comes."

"Now, who am de ooss ob dis yer gardinin'?"

"Jack Frost, I guess."

"No, sah, I's de boes, an' I won't hab you nor nobody else comin' round heah an' callin' me such names as you did jus' now. I's a man an' brudder, if I is black, mine dat," he said, spitefully, resuming his work.

In all the time he had been with Shorty he did not know him even then.

The two wags swapped winks.

"Ginger, I did not call you names. You fail to epitomize the latitude and longitude of my confabulatory and suggestive and circumlocutory etymology apertaining to the thermometrical environments of this unprecedented suddenness of floral presentation, and—"

At this point Ginger fainted and fell upon the crocuses, crushing them back into the earth again.

But the Kid turned the garden-hose on him and he soon revived, making tracks for the house and threatening, as he had a hundred times before, to throw up his position.

Of course, the two comical runts had a bully laugh over the affair, and it was this that brought the Old Man to the front, or rather to one of the windows of the rear overlooking the situation.

This window had no weights, but was held in place, up or down, by a spring, and raising it, he thrust his fat bald head out of it to see what was going on.

But everything was quiet now, of course, and the jokers would have returned to the house, had not the Old Man's voice arrested their attention.

"Ah, boys, I don't blame you for laughing in such beautiful weather as this. Winter seems to have fled to his northern cave, and gentle, violet-eyed spring to have come suddenly upon us to stay. Oh, it is glorious!" said he, at the same time drawing a big breath of the balmy air.

"What?" exclaimed both Shorty and the Kid.

"As I was saying—"

"Too much cognac for dinner," suggested Shorty aside to the Kid.

"Sure."

"Ah! it will only be a little while now before we return to the farm, and it makes my old heart young again to think of it."

"Well, how does your old head feel?"

"As though it was on young shoulders; I always feel young in spring."

"What spring—car-spring or spring-bed?"

Just there was where Little Peter got in his fine work.

A chair stood by the window, and into this the youthful rascal climbed.

Snapping the spring of the sash, it came down on the Old Man's neck, pinning him to the window sill, and holding him there as though in a vise.

Then of course he skipped.

"Oh, ah, bah, wah!" he cried.

"What's the matter with yer?" asked Shorty.

"Wah—help!"

"Oh, go in! What'll ther neighbors think ter see yer playin' monkey tricks with yer head out of ther winder?—get in!"

"Oh, ah, help!" cried the pinioned victim, who by this time began to choke, and finally his tongue hung out of his mouth.

"Get in with yer monkeyin'!"

"I—I—help! I—I—" and by this time his eyes were bulging out like a frog's, and his face grew scarlet.

"Soy, der Ole Man's got a fit!" cried the Kid.

"Fit sure!"

"That's so," said Shorty, half in alarm.

"What'll we do?"

"Water!"

"Ah! here you are," replied Shorty, snatching up the garden hose.

Turning the stop-cock, he directed a stream of water full in his face, causing the Old Man to yell murder.

"Give it to him!" cried the Kid. "Serves him right for doin' monkey business in the back winder. Go it!"

Just then the three kids came out.

They saw the fun in an instant, and began to dance and clap their hands.

"Go it, po!"

"Wash down his front!"

"It's bully for sore eyes—he told me so!" and in the midst of the Old Man's misery they were having a first-class circus.

CHAPTER XII.

THE shouting and laughter in the back yard naturally attracted the attention of the three wives, and they ran to the back windows to see what it meant.

The Old Man's wife hurried into the room where he was pinioned, and was, of course, startled at beholding the very reverse of the picture in the preceding chapter.

Her husband had kicked himself nearly out of his clothes in his frantic struggles to get free; the water was still streaming into his face, and it was a picture indeed.

She instantly comprehended the situation, and with considerable effort threw up the sash and liberated her husband, who fell back on the floor, limp and decidedly moist.

A loud laugh outside greeted his exit, and the youngsters even shouted for him to get back and give them some more fun.

"In the name of goodness, Josiah, what does this mean?" demanded his terrified wife.

The Old Man blew the water from his mouth and nose, but replied not.

"Oh, ough!" he finally articulated.

"What is it—how happened it?"

"Ough! Bring me my rifle," said he.

"What for?"

"I—I want to render myself childless."

"Explain yourself?"

"Bring me my gun," said he, struggling slowly to his feet.

"Don't talk like a fool, Josiah Burwick, even if you must act like one," she protested.

"Bring me my gun, I say!"

"I will if you will shoot yourself."

The Old Man glared at her.

"Bring me my gun; I want to shoot those rascals out in the back yard."

"There is no one in the back yard but Ginger," said she, looking out, and then the wives of Shorty and the Kid came in.

"What has happened?" they asked.

"Goodness only knows. I came in here and found his head out of the window fastened down by the sash, and a stream of water from the garden hose playing upon it from the yard."

"Bring me my gun and I'll make two widows," protested the Old Man.

"Pshaw! How came your head out of the window in that way?" demanded his wife.

"Why, it was all an accident, I suppose, although I thought I heard somebody behind me. I had my head out of the window, talking with George and Charley, when the sash came down upon my neck and pinned me there. I shouted for help, but those two undersized disgraces to humanity said I had a fit and at once began playing the garden hose on me. Bring me my gun!"

"Don't make a fool of yourself."

Just then Shorty and the others came in.

"Oh, you villains!" he roared.

"Hello, dad. How are yer now—got over yer fit all right?" asked Shorty.

"Have another fit, pop!" said Ed.

"Hush!" cried his mother.

"Fit be hanged! You knew that I had no fit. You knew that I was held down by the sash and couldn't move, and yet in the face of that you played a stream of water into my face. Oh, the shame, the outrage of it!" he cried, with clenched fists.

"Of course it is a shame," said the wives.

"But how could we know?" demanded Shorty, looking indignant.

"Couldn't you see, you mangy runt—couldn't you see?" roared his father.

"See! We could see yer mug out of ther winder up here—we could hear yer jabberin' bout somethin'—we could see yer eyes and tongue hangin' out—"

"Well?"

"Well, we thought you had an appoetic fit, and so turned on ther nose."

"Cert," and both the Kid and Shorty laughed, as did the Shorty kids.

"Shut up and get out of here! Get out of my

sight—I never want to see you again!" roared the Old Man, at which the three kids scampered away to have a big laugh by themselves over the circus.

"Keep yer hair on, dad," said Shorty, gently.

"And you, too, begone, both of you, from my sight forever."

"Hole yer hosses, pop," said the Kid.

"You have played your last snap on me, and don't forget it."

"How about der hose, pop?"

"Shut up! You are a pair of ungrateful rascals, and I am sorry I ever saw you."

"You should be ashamed of yourself, George," protested his wife.

"Why, we thought he was havin' a fit, didn't we, Kiddy?"

"Cert; bad one, too."

"Oh, you knew better, but you thought there was so much fun in the situation that you would have thrown the water on him if you had known he was dead," said Mrs. Josiah.

"Oh, honest Indian!" said Shorty, holding up both hands.

"Me too!" added the Kid.

"Take them both away! They are no friends, no kindred of mine!" cried the Old Man.

"Come off, dad!"

"Come off, pop!"

"No, I repudiate you both. You have been two thorns in my side ever since I met you, ever since I was weak enough to admit our relationship. Go to!"

"Admit it! Do you want more proof?" exclaimed Shorty, indignantly.

"Proof?" asked the dazed Old Man.

"Cert, for if you do I will give you the Widow Bird, of California, and she will not only make good for me, but make it exceedingly pleasant for you at the same time."

The Old Man was on the point of retiring to his own room for dry clothes, brandy, and consolation, but at this he stopped and took a look at Shorty.

"Go back on me, dad?"

"Oh, thunder!" exclaimed the Old Man, and without further parley he made a bolt for his chamber, all broken up, and more firmly convinced than ever that his son and grandson knew all about that New Year's racket.

But his wife took him in hand, and got him into dry clothes, all the while having it in her mind about this Widow Bird, and finally she gave it to him.

"Who is she?"

"Who?" he asked.

"This California widow."

"I don't know."

"Ah, but you do, though," said she.

"No, honestly. That is only George's fun," said he, but really looking very guilty.

"Stop there!" cried she, severely.

"But I—I assure you, Angie—"

"Stop there. Confess yourself to Heaven: repent what's past, avoid what is to come!" said she, like a tragedy queen.

"Wh—what?" he asked, taken aback.

"Own up, or I will at once put detectives on your track, and end the whole business in getting a divorce."

"Oh, Angie!"

"No monkeying with the boarders. Who is this California widow on whom you called, and who made it so pleasant for you last New Years?"

"Oh, Angie, don't ask me to tell," said he, in a supplicating tone of voice.

"No. I do not ask you. I demand to know, Josiah Burwick!" said she, with more tragedy.

"Oh, Angie!" he

and the house, instead of being a private residence, is a club-house. I called for the alleged Mrs. Bird, and the young fellows threw me out of doors."

"They did, eh?"

"Yes, most unceremoniously."

"And that accounts for the condition you were in when you returned home and said you had been run over by a horse-car?" said she, with a sneer.

"Yes, Angie, I sadly confess it," said he, with a sigh.

"Josiah, I fear you are a bad, bad man," said she, although she could scarcely hold in the laugh which wanted to come forth.

"No, Angie, no, no. I am only human; I was only taken in," said he, pleadingly.

"And done for?" she asked.

"You are right, Angie, and hereafter I shall be very careful. Oh, the rascals!" he added.

"Well, now, see that you do. But remember that you are not forgiven, because your going to reply to that letter of invitation only shows what you would have done had it been genuine."

"Oh, Angie!" he said, reproachfully.

"Not another word. You are not above suspicion, and I shall hold you in thrall until you become a man again."

"Oh, Angie!"

Holding up her hand an instant, she waved it for silence and strode from the room, leaving the Old Man all mixed up.

"Oh, why did Shorty ever find me?" moaned he, after a moment's reflection. "Why did the mistake of my

"Hush!" replied Shorty.

"How much?"

"Graft!"

"Where?"

"Right here. The three wives are going up to Yonkers next week, taking the kids along with them to visit their Aunt Dolly."

"Good!"

"House all ours!"

"Yer bet!"

"Work the old man!"

"All der time!"

"Let her go."

"Let 'em all go."

"Cert. What snap?" asked the Kid.

"Wait. Let's find out how the old thing works,



"This way, dad!" he heard Shorty call out near the front door, and he made a rush for it. But it was locked, and Shorty nowhere to be seen. "Oh, dear—oh, dear! Where are you, George?" he called, in his terrible anxiety. "This way, pop!" yelled the Kid, out by the back door, and, still grasping the coal scuttle and water pitcher, he rushed in that direction.

"Well, yes," said he, after a moment's pause. "Rasher."

"Josiah, what have I been telling you these many years about your lack of saline matter?"

"Hey!"

"Your freshness, to put it plainer."

"Oh, ah—well, didn't it look all right?"

"Perhaps to a man who was looking for pleasure. But an honest family man would never have been caught by such chaff."

"But it was all a sell, Angie," he protested.

"Ah, it might have proved that, but you did not know that it was not a reality. You did not know but that there was a widow there who would make it pleasant for you, did you?"

"Well—er—"

"Of course not. Oh, Josiah, I did not think this o you," and to heighten the effect she began to mop her eyes.

This broke the Old Man up.

"But how about this freshness?" she asked, after listening to his protestations for a while.

"What?"

"I have warned you against Shorty and the Kid many times, and yet they set traps for you, and you put your feet into them just as often as you ever did—you, a wise old man and grandfather."

"That's so, Angie, but I swear off."

"So you have said before, but somehow or other you fall into every trap they set for you."

"But they'll never catch me again, never."

"Well, we shall see. But in order to be sure of that, you must keep away from them; don't join with them in anything, for the joy of their life seems to be to get you into some ridiculous situation."

youth ever mature and collar me in this shape? But it is done with now. No more for Josiah, if he knows it, and he will take very good care to know just what is going on around him. I will become frigid toward them; I will not associate with them any more save in a formal way. They are two sad wags, and their whole bent seems to be to make life a burden to me. No, I am done with them."

This the dear, good old bald-headed man settled upon in his own mind as earnestly as ever he settled upon anything, and for the week or two following he kept his word and held himself above them like an iceberg.

And this thing went on for some time, until Shorty and the Kid began to wonder at it; but finally they tumbled.

"Der house has fallen on der ole man," said the Kid, after thinking it over for a long time.

"House!"

"He has tumbled."

"Well, it's about time," said Shorty.

"Angie has put him up ter it."

"All right. We'll lay low for a while."

"Yer bet!"

But the Old Man was as solid as a big tombstone, and about as genial.

He avoided Shorty and the Kid in all possible ways, and he wasn't any more than social with the three little kids even.

Indeed, his son and grandson began to get nervous over the situation. It was evident that the Old Man's wife had taken a hand in the game and was keeping her husband out of temptation.

"Soy, what'll we give him?" asked the Kid, as they were playing billiards together about that time.

then we can twist up something," and on this they rested patiently.

But, true enough, Shorty's wife, the mother of the other two wives, had it all made up to visit her Aunt Dolly at Yonkers, taking with her the two interesting wives and all of their interesting kids.

She wanted to make a good impression on Aunt Dolly, for she possessed a big boddle and was getting quite old, while she and her children were her only natural heirs, and so in a few days the three runty Burwicks had the house all to themselves.

Even the Old Man felt somewhat galled at being left alone, and tried to get on more intimate terms with Shorty and the Kid.

But they wouldn't have it. They gave him the frigid shoulder and the below zero shake.

In other words, they kept aloof from him, as he had been keeping from them so long, knowing all the while that he wanted some fun.

They wanted some fun, too, but they wanted it in their own way, and were bound to have it so, or not at all, although they saw that he was unbending since his wife's departure and seemed actually anxious to be reckless, such a tough old sausage was he.

Shorty and the Kid kept clear of him, but they had their eyes on him all the same.

They winked to each other after they had concluded on something that they thought would make it pleasant for him, and they wanted it very pleasant, because of the way he had treated them.

The servants were allowed to go away for the night, with the exception of old Ginger, who was told to "say nothing and saw wood."

The Old Man, finding that the boys would not fraternize with him, finally went off to bed in disgust. He

would have given anything almost for a good lark with them, but they wouldn't have it.

Shorty and the Kid were watching, and when they were convinced that the Old Man was asleep they began their racket.

Taking a tin bath tub, they filled it full of old newspapers, placed it in the hallway, and set them on fire.

In a very short time the house was filled with smoke, although there was no danger.

Shorty ran to the Old Man's chamber and began to yell fire and pound on the door.

"Quick—quick! Get up or yer lost!"

The Old Man was aroused. He sat up in bed and glared around.

"Fire! fire! fire!"

"Ahi!" cried he, and he leaped out of bed.

"Fire! fire!" he heard again, and this time he recognized the voice of Shorty.

He leaped out of bed, and threw open the door leading into the hall.

It was filled with smoke and cries of fire so dreadful to hear.

"Oh, ah, wah!" cried the Old Man, in his newly aroused terror, and he closed the door to keep out the suffocating smoke.

He was thoroughly demoralized.

He ran around the room like a cat that had had its tail cut off.

He had a dim idea that he ought to try to save something besides his own life.

There were of course a great many valuables in the house, but the more he thought the more confused he became.

Finally he seized the coal scuttle and a water pitcher, and rushed wildly into the hall, dressed only in his night shirt.

But by this time he was nearly wild, and didn't know which way to go. Shorty and the Kid were in wait for him, however.

"This way, dad!" he heard Shorty call, out near the front door, and he made a rush for it.

But it was locked, and Shorty nowhere to be seen.

"Oh, dear—oh, dear! Where are you, George?" he called, in his terrible anxiety.

"This way, pop!" yelled the Kid, out by the back door, and, still grasping the coal scuttle and water pitcher, he rushed in that direction.

And so first one of them would yell for him to escape in front and the other at the back of the house, and back and forth he trotted, all broken up with excitement, and yet finding no means of exit.

Meantime, Ginger had removed the fire and put it out, although the halls were still full of smoke and things smelled serious if they did not look so.

The Old Man was nearly crazy as well as out of his mind. He called imploringly for Shorty and the Kid as he ran back and forth in his endeavors not only to find them but to find a means of exit.

"Fire all out!" yelled Shorty, finally.

"Yes, all out!" replied the Kid, from somewhere.

"I—I—is it all out?" moaned the Old Man, when they all three presently met in the lower hall.

"Fire all out!" cried Ginger, joining them.

"Oh, Lord, how thankful I am. I didn't have a chance to save half of our things," said the Old Man, holding up the coal scuttle and water pitcher, which of course created a great laugh.

CHAPTER XIII.

"WHERE was it?" asked the Old Man, still holding on to the coal-scuttle and water-pitcher, and glaring wildly around.

"What?" asked Shorty.

"Why, the fire, to be sure."

"What fire?"

"Why, this fire!"

"Bah!" said both Shorty and the Kid.

"What?" exclaimed the Old Man.

"Of course there was no fire."

"Cert not."

"What do you mean? What is the meaning of all this smoke?" he demanded.

"Oh, Ginger only lit a piece of paper to find a pin he had dropped," replied Shorty.

"What?"

"Cert."

"And there was no fire?"

"Nix."

"Only smoke—that's all."

"But who shouted fire?"

"Ginge, because he burned his fingers."

"But I heard you shouting."

"Oh, well, I didn't know what it was. But, say, what yer doin' with ther coal-hod?"

"An' der water-pitcher?" added the Kid.

The Old Man looked first at one hand and then at the other.

The ludicrousness of the thing caused even him to laugh. The idea of rushing from a burning house with a coal-hod and a water-pitcher, leaving behind hundreds of dollars' worth of portable valuables.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Ginger, and at the same time he went through all sorts of gymnastics expressive of his tickledness.

"Shut up, Ginger!"

"Yes, sah," and he closed his trap.

"The idea of making all this row just on account of burning a little paper. It is a wonder the fire department did not get the alarm, burst in our doors and windows, and flood the whole house with water," said the Old Man.

"Soy, so they would if we'd only let you out ter start der whoop," said the Kid.

"That's so," put in Shorty.

"Oh, fo' shoo!" cried Ginger.

"Silence, Ginger!" roared the Old Man.

"Yes, sah."

"It was all your fault, you black coon, and the next time you fill the house full of smoke and kick up such a shindy I will throw you out of a window."

"Yes, sah."

"Open the windows now and push this smoke out of the house, confound you."

"Yes, sah."

And then the Old Man, feeling chilly by this time, started for his room again, and even yet clinging to the hod and pitcher.

"Good-night, dad."

"Good-night, pop."

"Good-night, boys; but say," he called back to them from the head of the stairs, "don't say a word about this to the folks."

"What! don't yer want Angie to know how fearlessly yer rescued that hod and pitcher?"

"Oh, don't say anything about it, please."

"All right," and with this assurance the Old Man returned to his chamber, leaving Shorty and the Kid below to have their laugh out, while Ginger was busy shoveling out the smoke that had filled the house.

Once more had they enjoyed a racket on the Old Man, and once more without his tumbling to it. Also, once more with Ginger's connivance and without setting a bad example to the three kids who were away.

But the laugh of Shorty and the Kid was as a zephyr compared to a cyclone when Ginger got in his concatenations of yapping.

It wasn't every day that he was allowed to get in on a thing of this kind, and he shook the windows with his laughter over it, and when his fellow-servants returned he told it to them in such a way that they joined heartily in the laugh.

They met at breakfast in the morning.

It was something like their old-time bachelor breakfasts, and Ginger was serving it.

The Old Man looked very serious when he entered the dining-room, and the laugh had died on the mugs of Shorty and the Kid.

But Ginger was ready to burst with the laughter he had under cover. It seemed to be equal to fifty pounds to the square inch.

The Old Man took his accustomed place at the table and ordered his accustomed steak, fried potatoes and chocolate, and after receiving it he proceeded to look at Ginger severely.

Ginger knew what it was for, and that made it even harder for him to withstand the pressure of the laugh that wanted to come forth.

"Ginger?" he finally said.

"Yes, sah," he responded, with an effort.

"Don't let that thing occur again. Only to think if the women folks and the dear children had not been away from home, what a panic might have been produced by your stupid work. It makes me shudder to think of it."

"Me, too," put in the Kid.

"Terrible!" suggested Shorty, soberly.

"Just think of it, boys," said he, turning to them, "Who ever heard of such a stupid thing as burning several newspapers for the sake of finding a lost pin, and thereby endangering goodness knows how many lives? Why, Ginger, you coon, you deserve to be sent to jail for doing such a thing."

"Cert."

"Of course he had."

"Ginger?" said the Old Man, severely.

"Yes, sah."

"I have a great mind to smash you in the nose for being such a stupid idiot."

"Yes, sah."

"And, if I ever know you to do such a thing again, there will be a coon's corpse sent to the morgue, remember that."

"Yes, sah."

"What in thunder are you grinning at? Is it a subject for bone showing?" the Old Man demanded.

"No, sah."

"Then keep that confounded big mouse-trap of yours closed."

"Yes, sah."

But just then he had an excuse to go to the kitchen, and there he let himself go on a laugh that made the hot-water boiler shake, after which he calmed down a little and went up-stairs to finish serving breakfast.

"It was a dreadful scare. How fortunate it was that the folks were away," said the Old Man, while Ginger was out of the room.

"Sure pop," said Shorty.

"No knowing what might have happened."

"Of course not. You might have attempted to rescue the ice-box as well as the coal-hod and a water-pitcher."

"Oh, that's all right, but it is altogether too serious a matter to joke on."

"Cert. Soy, pop, dat coon oughter get somethin' done ter him for dat monkey business," said the Kid, with seeming dead earnestness.

"Right you are," added Shorty.

"Indeed! I think so, too," said the Old Man, for it didn't seem to be in his nature to tumble unless something heavier than he was fell on him.

"Let's put up a job to punish him, eh?"

"Good idea," said the Kid.

"Make the duffer sick!"

"Make him hump himself to save his life."

"Yes, yes, it would serve him right, boys. Hush! here he comes. I will meet you in the billiard-room presently, and we will contrive something for his punishment."

"All right," and then Shorty and the Kid swapped one of their old sly winks.

Ginger returned to finish serving breakfast, and by this time had become sobered down to such an extent that he could attend to his duties without looking as though the top of his head was going to fall over on his back, but at the same time he didn't have sufficient faith in himself to risk looking at either Shorty or the comical Kid.

Nothing further was said, and, breakfast being over, they all retired.

The two jokers did not go directly to the billiard-room, where they knew the Old Man would presently be, but they retired to a room in Shorty's apartments for the purpose of talking over any idea that might suggest itself to help him get square with Ginger.

And even the Old Man was not yet ready to give up on practical jokes, in spite of all the experience he had taken pieces of. He felt like punishing Ginger and having some fun with him at the same time; so he also got in his cogitation on the subject.

But while they were all engaged upon the subject it was all knocked in the head by the return of the family.

It would never do for the Old Man to attempt any practical jokes while his wife was about the house, so reluctantly he weakened and put off the snap until some other time.

On the following day came a surprise for all of them in the person of an old chap by the name of Pegger, who had known the Old Man in California, and, being on East, he had sought him out for old acquaintance sake.

Pegger was a character.

He was about sixty years of age, homely as a mule, possessed of but one eye and one meat leg. The other was made of wood, and he never had the rheumatism in it.

He had started a little shoe-making shop in San Francisco years before, and his business had grown until it made him a rich man, and in the old times he and the Old Man had been on very friendly terms.

Indeed, he was very glad to see him and did all he could to make it pleasant for him, rather, however, to the disgust of the rest of the family, for Pegger was not exactly a daisy.

He took him out to ride, and showed him the features of the metropolis, never forgetting to keep the old fellow in mind of the fact that he was the head and front of one of the finest families in the city, and he dwelt more especially on his younger son, whom he had named California, in honor of the State in which he had made all his money.

And all this seemed to be very pleasing to Mr. Pegger, who was proud of his old California acquaintance, especially as his royal entertainment was costing him nothing, for at home he begrimed even the price of a horse-car fare, and took his meals at a cheap restaurant, while piling one dollar on top of another in making himself rich.

The three kids had been on their good behavior for quite a while, and the Old Man was very proud of them.

He extolled them; he showed them off in what they had learned at school, and as it was more already than Pegger knew, he was not at all backward in pronouncing them three of the smartest boys he had ever seen, and for about the fiftieth time congratulated his old-time friend on having found his son and grandson, which led up to the present felicity.

Indeed, he felt so much at home with his old friend that he seemed inclined to remain with him for an indefinite length of time, all of which the rest of the family objected to, as Pegger was simply an old ruiserly bore.

But the kids caught on to that wooden leg of his. That is to say, they questioned the Old Man about it, and found among other things that he did not sleep with it—that he took it off when he went to bed, although he was punching holes in the carpets all over the house with the spike that was in the foot-end of it, greatly to the disgust of the wives.

Those kids held a consultation over that wooden leg. From what they had heard their parents say they knew that it was regarded by them as a nuisance, to say nothing of the owner of it, and they concluded to get possession of it.

Pegger occupied a room in the rear of the house in the Old Man's third of it. It was a nicer place than he had ever occupied before in his life, and although the family did not appear to be overjoyed at his presence, he concluded to remain here during his stay in New York, and the Old Man was too good-hearted and polite to hint that three days were enough for a visit of that kind.

On the morning of the fourth day those kids, or one of them, stole into Pegger's room and secured the wooden leg while he slept, and they took it down to the kitchen for inspection.

What a curiosity it was, both to them and the servants.

"Say," said young California, "wouldn't it make a bully base ball bat?"

looked from the basement windows, other members of the family not being astir yet.

The wooden leg was rather short and rather heavy for a bat, but they managed it very well and were having lots of fun when Pegger arose and began to look around for it.

What had become of his wooden pedal he could not imagine; but hearing the laughter in the back yard, he hobbled on one leg to the window and looked out.

Cal was just taking his innnings, having caught out Ed on a "tick," and the old fellow instantly discovered that they were using his cherished wooden leg for a bat.

He threw up the sash, and yelled:

"Here, you young scapegraces, bring back my wooden leg, or I will tell your parents!"

"Oh, go shoot jack-rabbits!" said Cal.

"Bring back my leg!"

set out in search of a dealer to come and take his measure for a leg.

In the meantime the family had come down to breakfast, and been informed by Ginger of what had happened, and how the kids had skipped to school as they did.

In spite of all they could but laugh over the affair, had procured a new leg, even if Pegger did not go away.

Shorty and the Kid, however, were inclined to look upon it differently, and while laughing over the action of the youngsters, and the misfortune that had befallen the Old Man, they concluded to put up a job that would make him so sick that he would never entertain another California friend, and Ginger joined heartily with them, as did the wives.

Pegger kept his room, and had his meals taken to it until a hundred-dollar leg was fitted to the old stump,

But just then Ginger showed in a fat old Irish woman with the same announcement as before.

"Arrah, Mr. Shortness, how have ye been all ther foile since we used ter be such ould cronies in Californy?" said she, rushing upon the bewildered victim with extended hands.

"Get out, confound you! This is some job. I never saw one of you before."

"Fut! wud yees soy that, Mr. Shortness, after all that's been betwixt us? Och, worra, worra!"

"Get out!"

"Well, Josiah, I must say that you have a choice lot of friends from the Pacific coast," said his wife, sneeringly.

"They are not my friends at all. I never saw them before. Get out, every one of you!"

"Me too?" asked Peggar.

"Yes—every soul of you, get out!" he roared.



"Hello, Mr. Burwick!" said he, rushing for the Old Man. "I'm yer old pal, Jim Ling, from Frisco. Don't yer remember me?" "No, sir! I never saw you before in my life," said the Old Man, drawing back in disgust. "Oh, yer don't know yer ole friends now that yer've got rich, eh? Wal, that's ther way of ther world."

"Come, get it."

"Boys, I can't."

"Well, that's bully for us! Let her go! Out!"

Old Pegger disappeared from the window, and it was evident that he would alarm the household, so they skipped into the house.

Nor was this all they did; for, rushing into the cellar, they opened the furnace door and chucked the wooden leg into its heap of red-hot coals, where it was quickly burned, and then they caught up their books and made a bee-line for school, laughing like the gladsome, mischievous little rascals they were, but preferring to go without their breakfast rather than to encounter their parents and old Pegger.

But it was a nice row he made when the Old Man responded to his summons. He swore it was an outrage, and that he would make trouble in the Burwick household if that leg was not returned.

The Old Man felt bad, and tried to soothe his guest. He also tried to find his wooden leg, but after questioning the servants he concluded that he would only find it in ashes.

But the thing must be hushed up for the sake of the family, so he told him that he would procure him a patent anatomical leg if he would remain in his room during the day; a leg that would be equal to the original flesh and bone one.

This mollified Pegger entirely. He had always wanted one of those patent legs, but was too mean to pay the price, and had stumped around for years on that old peg. So he agreed to it, and the Old Man especially as the kids were not there, and the wives congratulated themselves that there would be no more ruin wrought in their carpets when the Old Man

after which he came down to the parlor and concluded that he had never felt better in his life, and the Old Man smiled again.

But his smile was not for long.

Presently Ginger answered the bell, and admitted to the parlor the worst-looking specimen of a tramp that was ever seen.

"Hello, Mr. Burwick!" said he, rushing for the Old Man. "I'm yer old pal, Jim Ling, from Frisco. Don't yer remember me?"

"No, sir! I never saw you before in my life," said the Old Man, drawing back in disgust.

"Oh, yer don't know yer ole friends now that yer've got rich, eh? Wal, that's ther way of ther world. But yer must remember those ole rackets we used to go on in Frisco, eh?"

"No, sir!" thundered the Old Man, for just then the three wives entered the parlor. "Begone!"

"Oh, no! I've come ter stay. Yer can't shake me that way, Josiah," said he, taking a seat on a beautifully-upholstered easy-chair.

"Here, Ginger, ring for a policeman!" yelled the Old Man, but just then Ginger opened the parlor door and showed in a negro and a Chinaman.

"Some mo' ob you Californy friends, sah."

"Josiah Burwick, what does this mean?" asked his wife, and even old Pegger looked amazed.

"Hang me if I know. Get out, all of you! Ring for a policeman; this is an outrage!"

"Me Hook Ski—know me. Me use takie all through Chinatown an' see slights," said the Chinaman.

"No, confound you, I never saw either of you before. Call an officer, Ginger!" roared the Old Man.

"Another ob you Californy friends, sah," said Ginger, showing in a fat Dutch woman; and just then Shorty and the Kid appeared as coming from the reception-room.

"How you vos, Mr. Purwig?" asked the newcomer.

"Confund you all!—get out!

"Hello, dad—some more of your California friends?" asked Shorty, laughing.

"No, no—confound you and them! This is some o' your work!" he howled, indignantly.

"No—we are all his friends!" exclaimed the rough company, springing up and surrounding him.

"That settles it! Out you go, every mother's son of you!" exclaimed Shorty, rushing for the front door. "Git, every Californian of you!"

Of course they all knew the parts they had been paid to play, and so they got out with a laugh and many chaffs back at the Old Man.

Pegger also took the hint, and followed without leaving a regret behind, and once more the Shorty household was left to the family.

CHAPTER XIV.

EVERYBODY laughed but the Old Man, and he looked ugly enough to cut up into cyclones.

"Who started this thing?" he demanded.

"You did," replied Shorty.

"Cert," chipped in the Kid.

"Of course you did," said the wives, in chorus.

"How?"

"Well, how about Pegger?" and then there was another burst of laughter.

"What about Pegger?"

"Pegger!"

"Pegger!"

"Pegger!"

"Pegger!"

"Oh, Pegger!" This was the Old Man's wife.

"Well?"

"Wasn't he yer first California friend?"

"And hasn't he punched more than five hundred holes in our carpets with the spike in the end of his wooden leg?" demanded Shorty's wife.

"Was he any worse than your other friends?"

"I tell you they were not my friends. I never saw them before in my life."

"How do we know—how do we know that you ever saw Pegger before?"

"Oh, I understand you now. This was a put-up job to get rid of Pegger," said he.

"Poor Pegger!"

"So sorry he has gone!"

"Too bad 'bout ther kids playin' ball with his wooden leg," said Shorty.

"An' then helpin' ter heat der house with it," added the Kid, laughing.

"Better say too bad that your father had to replace it with a hundred-dollar one so that he could get away," said Angie.

"Oh, dad don't mind little things like that on account of his guests," said Shorty.

The Old Man gazed from one to the other, and his mug was a study for an artist.

"Poor old California pal!"

"Poor old Pegger!"

"Nice old man!"

"Handsome man, too, was Pegger!"

"And he has pegged out!"

"Alas—alas!" they all said, together.

"Now, look here, I've had enough of this," said the Old Man, after standing their chaff as long as he could.

"So have we!" they said, in chorus.

"My friend Pegger is a very nice man."

"So were they all nice men."

"And women," suggested the Old Man's wife.

"This is all nonsense. I am not very much in love with Pegger myself, but you hated him and put up this job to run him out. That's what I call mean. He wouldn't have stayed more than a week longer, anyhow."

"Only a week!"

"A little week!"

"Only six days longer!"

"And he has gone!"

"So sad—so sad!" came in the Kid.

"Well, it's mean if it isn't sad, and what is more, those boys must be punished for taking away his leg, or it will encourage them in more mischief."

"Better give them a medal for doing a good thing," said Shorty, and because they all agreed with him the Old Man got mad and rushed out of the room, followed by a laugh that galled him all the more.

He wasn't sorry that Pegger had gone, but he didn't relish the laugh and the job that had been put up to run him out.

"The same old thing over again," he mused, when alone in his chamber. "I never undertook a thing in my life that it didn't go back on me. Confound Pegger! He is an old nuisance and I had no business to entertain him. I might have known that these rascals would have put up some sort of a job to make it pleasant for me. Oh, I wish I were dead! I wish that the cold and clammy earth rested upon my inanimate form, and that all this nonsense was over. But there is no use of my attempting to shuffle off this mortal coil unless I make it 'for keeps.' They would be sure to make a laugh out of it at my expense, and when I come to think of it, I am not quite ready to die yet. But it's terrible, the misfortunes I have to bear! Talk about the sins of the father being visited upon the child!—down the dim vista of the past my ancestors must have been a lot of toughs—Thugs perhaps, and their sins are all coming on my poor narrow shoulders."

He dwelt upon this for some time, and finally he fell asleep.

Sleep was always a great thing for the Old Man. With him it was as Shakespeare says, "Sleep that knits up the raveled sleeve of care," and after the Old Man had taken about ten hours of it, he was all right.

So it was in this instance. He went to sleep after he had mastered his emotions, and slept like a baby until the next morning, just in time for breakfast.

Shorty and the Kid, together with the three wives, had enjoyed their laugh, and understood that the Old Man was cured. It was safe to say that no more California or other old-time acquaintances would ever quarter themselves on him again.

And so when he came down to breakfast the next morning everything was lovely, and not a word was said about what had happened, and this made him feel as jolly as a big sun-flower.

He even tried to be jolly, and there was nobody to prevent him. They would much rather have him jolly than otherwise, for when he was so he filled the whole house with the sunshine of his amiability.

Even the three kids made no allusion to the racket, and Ginger looked as sober as the deacon of a colored church.

Breakfast over, the kids started out with their bright faces for school, and the other members of the family betook themselves to whatever duties and attractions there were for them, leaving the house as usual in the hands of Ginger and the servants.

School was more than half a play spell for the kids, for they used to mix fun and study up in the proportion of one study to ten funs, it being a private school, where, of course, the teacher would bear a

deal more from them than the public school teachers would.

There were several other mischief-makers in Mr. Ding's private school, but the three Shorty kids were the recognized leaders, and many a job did they put up on the young man who was trying to teach the young idea how to shoot—at so much per month.

Ding was a queer sort of a fellow. He was only about twenty years of age, but he was homely enough to be a hundred. He wore eye-glasses about five feet from the floor when he was standing up, and was about as big around as a strong man's leg.

But Ding knew which side his bread was buttered on. He knew that the parents of the dozen or more pupils he had were rich—that the most of them (like the Shorty kids) had been fired out of the public schools, and that he could get well paid for teaching them, even if he did not learn them much or have a very orderly school.

Once in a while he would tickle some of them with his official gad, but as a general thing he scolded them for their shortcomings—caring very little whether he spoiled the child by sparing the rod or not.

"Peter Pad Burwick, Ed Burwick, California Burwick, Amos Green, Robert Williams—come up here and recite your geography lesson," said Mr. Ding, with a frown.

And those five hopefuls, constituting the first class in geography, marched up upon the form.

The teacher looked them over severely.

They all looked solemn and honest. They were always solemn, honest looking boys.

"Peter Pad Burwick, bound Barren Island," said the teacher.

Peter turned his eyes up to the ceiling, and after a moment's hesitation began to "bound."

"Barren Island is bounded on the north by the New York Board of Health," said he.

"Correct," said the teacher. "On the east?"

"On the east by Coney Island."

"Correct again. On the west?"

"By the Long Island railroad and Rockaway."

"On the south?"

"By Ed and Sheephead Bay."

"Correct. California Burwick."

"Yes, sir."

"Bound the Brooklyn Bridge."

"Brooklyn Bridge is bounded on the east by Mayor Low; on the west by Gotham; on the south by Governor's Island; and—"

"And on the north?"

"By the anchorages, bound. See?"

"Correct. Ed Burwick, box the compass."

"What?" asked Ed.

"Box the compass."

"Marquis of Queensbury rules?"

"No, sir; nautically speaking," said the teacher, savagely.

"What's his weight?"

"Silence, sir! Box the compass."

"I'll box any fellow of my size, but I don't want any heavy weight duffer sprung on me."

"Idiot! Next," cried Ding, and they all looked at each other to see who who was the "next" idiot.

"Robert Williams, box the compass."

"North, South, East, West, Northwest, North southwest, East southwest, South south—"

"Silence, sir! Go to the foot of the class. Amos Green, what are the principal features of Massachusetts?"

"Three women to one man."

"Right. What are its products?"

"Beans and poetry."

"Correct. What are its sea products?"

"Codfish."

"How are they most generally presented to the markets of the world?"

"With their overcoats unbuttoned."

"Explain."

"When they catch 'em they vote 'em too fresh, so they unbutton and salt 'em for keeps."

"Correct. What is the principal river of New Jersey?"

"Applejohn."

"Where does it rise?"

"In Jugornot."

"Where does it flow?"

"Down Jerseyman gulch."

"Correct. About the equinoxes—when are the shortest days?"

"When yer broke."

"When are the longest?"

"When yer waiting for borrowed money to be paid."

"Correct in the main, but too flippant," said Mr. Ding, and he was on the point of reading the class a lecture, when some member of the school yelled "Rats!"

Instantly there was a commotion, and the whole company rose to its feet.

But the fun of it was there was a rat which somebody had let loose, and it was running around the school-room like mad.

Then there was fun!

"Hey-ho! What is it?" asked Ding.

"Rats!" they all yelled, and then began a wild rush after the rodent.

"Order!" yelled the teacher.

"Rats!" whooped the scholars.

They went for that rat, some with books and others with slates; others with anything they could get hold of.

"Order!" yelled Ding.

"Rats!" came the echo again, and by this time there was no such a thing as restoring order.

The boys were up in arms, and when the teacher attempted to stem the tide, they managed to rush

that rat into his vicinity and then they went for him, while pretending to be hunting that wild and untamed rat.

They hit him on the head with books and slates; they pushed him over and jumped on him; they rolled him over and jumped on him some more.

Oh, but wasn't it a circus!

"Stop it! Behave!" cried Ding, and just then young Peter Pad Burwick seized a bottle of ink and poured it over his face, all the while yelling "Rats!" while the others, to make it more pleasant for him, were sticking pins into various portions of his person.

"Murder! Help!" he yelled, while they were making it so pleasant for him.

"Rats! Kill him! Kill him!" was the cry, and then there was a rush in another direction which allowed Ding to regain his feet.

But while he was doing so the scholars were hunting that rat.

Finally they killed him, and young Ed held him up by the tail.

"Ha, ha, ha!" they all cried, while the teacher was mopping the ink all over his face, and trying to pull himself into shape.

But he was a comical sight, you bet!

"Boys, I shall kill some of you!" said he.

"Rats!" they all cried, in chorus.

"Here he is! We have got him!" said Ed, dangling the dead rat before the face of the bewildered teacher.

"Order!" roared Ding, or he rather piped it, with his little weak voice.

"There he is, Mr. Ding!"

"Rats!"

"Silence, or I shall hurt some of you. What does this all mean?"

"Rats!" they all yelled again.

"Silence!"

"All quiet, now—here he is!" and again was that murdered rodent held up before him.

"Rascals!" cried Ding, and, snatching the dead rat from Ed, he rushed to the window, threw it up, and threw it out.

But he was so mad by this time that he never stopped to think that he looked more like a negro than a white man, on account of the ink that had been poured upon him, and that he had mopped all over his face.

And yet his scholars laughed.

They whooped. They turned that school-room into a circus, and all the while Mr. Ding was trying to restore order.

Finally he seized his rattan and went for the three kids.

"Whish! vipl! phat!"

They got it, as they deserved, but just then Ding caught sight of his face in a glass, and he stopped suddenly to look at himself.

"School is dismissed for the day," said he, and the words made joyous music to the ears of his scholars, who grabbed their hats and coats and made a rush from the place.

Poor Ding!

This was about the worst racket that had ever been worked upon him.

Not only was he made black by the ink, but he felt terribly sensible of the fact that he had received sundry kicks from juvenile shoes, and pricks from pins thrust by juvenile hands, and he felt like giving up and taking a position as coal-heaver on a North river canal-boat rather than continue the life that the scholars were making miserable for him.

duty to explain *why* they arrived home earlier than usual," and into the Old Man's distended ears he poured the story of the rat that his son had brought to school in a cigar box and let loose in the school-room.

The Old Man was dumfounded.

"My son, do you say?" he finally asked.

"Yes, sir, your son, California. He is the worst one of the three worst boys I ever knew."

"Why, sir, you confound me."

"And they would certainly confound you were you in my place. It is impossible for me to do anything with them, and you must take them from my school," said he, firmly, and without further words he rose and left the room to that astonished parent.

Fully five minutes did he sit there, the picture of amazement and sorrow, trying to think what he should do.

"Why, that little rascal is the veriest hypocrite I ever knew in my life," he mused. "That was what Ed meant by 'Rats.' Natural history, indeed!"

While in this state of mind the other five parents entered the room. They all noted the Old Man's dejection and asked about it.

"I'll tell you all about it; I will never attempt to shield the young rascals any more," whereupon he told the story of the rat and of the expulsion of the three kids from Mr. Ding's school.

The Kid was inclined to laugh at the racket, but the sorrowful faces of the others restrained him. But the great question was what should be done with the little delinquents?

"Boarding-school," suggested Shorty, sternly.

"I agree with you," said the Old Man.

"Bad eggs," said the Kid, shaking his head.

"No worse than their fathers, I guess," snapped Shorty's wife, and as the other two mothers sided with her, it looked for a while as though it would result in a family row.

But quiet was finally restored, and it was agreed that nothing should be said to the kids of what had been found out about them, only that they were not to go to Mr. Ding's school any more.

This gave the youngsters several holidays, while their parents were trying to find a boarding-school where the discipline would be severe enough to keep them in place.

Finally one was found, and each of those unhappy fathers lifted his surprised son by the ear, much to their consternation.

"Come!" they all cried together.

"Where, papa?" meekly asked Cal.

"To a boarding-school where you will have to behave or suffer."

"Come!" they all said together again, and those little hunks of mischief were hustled away very unceremoniously.

CHAPTER XV.

THOSE crest-fallen kids were hustled off to a boarding-school at Hickory Point, kept by Mr. Thump, a stern old teacher, who enjoyed the reputation of breaking more boyish colts than any other teacher in or around New York.

And three more badly broken-up youngsters are not often seen.

They understood now that Mr. Ding had not only discovered the perpetrator of the rat snap, but he had given the whole thing away to their parents, and this was what made life seem a burden and a mockery to them as they left the frowning presence of their parents.

And where were they going?"

They were delivered to a bald-headed Irishman belonging to the boarding-school, and who rejoiced in the name of O'Peat, and by him taken in a carriage out to Hickory Point.

Scarcely a word was spoken for a long time, until youthful Peter began to question the driver, Mr. O'Peat, regarding their destination.

"Sure an' it's bad b'ys I hear yeas are, but ther veryould Nick is in store for yeas if yeas don't behave where yer goin'," replied O'Peat.

The kids looked at each other ruefully, but they had no more to say. It seemed as though they were being taken to prison, and as they sat there in silence in that old coach, tears stole into the eyes of more than one of them.

But finally they arrived at Hickory Point, yet it was so dark that they could get only a very dim idea of what the place was like.

They were taken at once to the room of Mr. Thump, and stood up before him as he looked them over.

And he looked them over carefully, for he had not only heard from their parents that they were inclined to be mischievous, but he knew Ding, and had heard what he had to say regarding them.

Thump asked their names, and wrote them down in his book, after which he read them the rules of the school, which seemed to them to be terribly tyrannical, after which he savagely informed them that any infraction of those rules would be followed by congenial punishment.

When this was over with they were shown into the dining-room by a servant, and after partaking of a very slim meal they were shown to their chamber—a good-sized room, containing two beds, which, of course, gave them to understand that two of them had got to sleep in one bed.

But they were too much broken up to think much of that, and, after discussing the situation for awhile in low tones, they went to bed, in the hope that the next morning would present a more inviting picture to them, for they had arrived too late for the regular supper, and so saw none of the other scholars, while the whole surroundings were cold and forbidding in the extreme.

But it was some time before they could get asleep. The change was not only too great, but even now they felt homesick, as almost any boy would under the circumstances, and they also felt exceedingly sorry for what they had done. Boys are generally sorry when it is too late.

The big "rising-bell" roused them from their slumbers the next morning, and without loss of time they proceeded to dress themselves.

But a view from their window did not convince them that they had been put in a very nice place. Indeed, quite the reverse.

Soon afterward the breakfast-bell rang, and on hearing the other fellows rushing through the hall, they concluded to join them.

On arriving in the breakfast-room, where they were assigned seats by the waiter, they took a look around, and soon saw that they were without doubt the smallest boys of the whole school, as well as the youngest.

There was very good order maintained at the table, but the kids overheard several uncomplimentary remarks regarding themselves, all of which they remembered for future use.

And so the day and their connection with the new boarding-school began.

When school began they were examined by Mr. Thump to see how much they knew, which wasn't so very much in what he examined them in, but if he had found out how much mischief they knew he would have been very much surprised at it.

However, they were assigned to the lowest class and given the lesson of the day, and when it came to recitation they were all right. Indeed, Mr. Thump began to think they were not such bad boys after all. They had never been brought under proper discipline.

He believed in discipline to take the kinks out of unruly boys, and he applied it on all occasions to its fullest extent.

So far as the other boys were concerned, they only laughed at the kids. They were too small to fight with or to play with, they thought, and so the most they condescended to do was to laugh at them.

And how lonesome the little fellows were—lonesome and as homesick as borrowed dogs, wishing with all their hearts that they had never played "Rats" on Mr. Ding.

Nor were they alone in being lonesome, for their parents missed them very much, and even Ginger wished them home again before they had been away a week.

But the kids got used to it sooner than their parents did, for they soon got acquainted with some of the boys at school, and soon convinced them that they were not to be laughed at if they were little, and gradually they gained the confidence of their elders to such an extent that they were let into many of their secrets.

But it was evident that the scholars were all afraid of old Thump, for all of their little larks were kept very dark, so much so that the kids wondered at it.

That wasn't their style of doing things, they all agreed, and so one night when Mr. Thump got into his bed, he found several chunks of ice in between the sheets which caused him to do some lively hustling in getting out, together with some very high pressure words he would have flogged his boys for making use of.

Of course the bed was spoiled for the night, and he had to find another one. But he swore to find out the author of the outrage and visit him with condign punishment.

He asked the servants if they had seen any of the boys in or around his room the day before, but they all said they hadn't, and Thump began to despair of finding the culprit, knowing very well that none of them would give a fellow away, even if they knew the guilty party, so he resolved on doing a little detective work, and the first thing he did was to secretly set one boy against another on the quiet.

But this proved unavailing, for the real culprit never gave it away, save to the other two kids with whom it was perfectly safe.

So old Thump had to swallow his bitter pill much against his will, but he finally settled it in his mind that it was done by one of the kids.

This made him more severe than ever and he kept a sharp eye on them, hoping to catch them in some act of delinquency, so that he could get a chance to pay off the debt he believed he owed them.

But they also had their bright eyes out for him, and three nicer behaved boys could not be found. Indeed they were too good to correspond with the reputation that had preceded them, so much so that it looked suspicious, which they were not wise enough to know.

And yet they kept right on being real good boys and entirely above suspicion, even when somebody stole Mr. Thump's plug hat one night, filled it with water, and left it out on the front stoop to freeze solid.

Then Thump got madder than a wet cat and went for Biddy O'Digger who had charge of his rooms, he being an old bachelor.

"Confounds you, if you don't know who did it, you did it yourself," said he, in his wrath perpetrating an Irish bull superior to anything the girl could get off herself.

"Bad luck ter yeas that I had nothin' ter do wid yer ould hat, an' I don't know who did lest 'twas yerself. Sure, yeas must have drapped it when yeas war tryin' ter foind ther kay-hole after comin' home from ther lodge," said she, laughing, but still very mad.

"What nonsense. I didn't wear it last night at all," replied Thump, savagely.

"Then why didn't yeas see it when yer came home?"

"Because it was dark. Oh, I'll thrash somebody for this outrage," said he harshly.

"But yeas won't thrash me, Mr. Thump," said she,

with her arms akimbo and her head on one side, looking defiantly up into his face.

Thump started back as if alarmed.

"Maybe yeas can thrash little b'ys, but ye'd better not lave yer hand on me, moind that now."

"I—I said nothing about such a thing."

"Faix, an' ye'd better not."

"But that hat is ruined," said he, holding it up, both to change the subject and to show that it was filled with ice, solid as a rock.

"Divil a hair I care," said she, turning away, leaving old Thump nearly paralyzed.

He couldn't make it out at all, and although the hat wasn't worth half a dollar, and hadn't been for the past ten years, yet he prized it highly, and smarting under the indignity, he left it to thaw out and went to the school-room, the "second bell" being just started a ringing by the janitor.

Both he and the janitor had keys to the school-room, although none of the scholars were ever admitted until he came and opened it. Quite a crowd of boys stood waiting in the vestibule on whom he frowned as he proceeded to open the door. Several of the boys followed him, among whom were the kids, but he was too mad to do anything but scowl.

He went to his desk, threw aside his coat and hat, and seemed just ready to read the riot act, while the boys were getting seated. Then he took out his key and opened his desk, throwing up the cover, when out there flew a big rooster, and lighting on the rail, proceeded to utter a triumphant cock-a-doodle-do! which the boys answered with a louder laugh.

If Thump was ever more astonished in his life he did not remember it, or that he was ever madder. He pounded the desk with his ruler and yelled for silence.

"Silence, you rascals!" cried Thump, banging the desk with his ruler, scaring the rooster out of half a crow as he flew down and tried to escape. "Silence, you graceless vagabonds!" he roared again, and as the boys went snickering to their seats, he attempted to interview that rooster.

But that rooster was no weather cock, and he didn't want to be interviewed, so he ran wildly around the school-room, underneath and around the pupils' desks, until finally they all, like good, charitable boys, were engaged with the master in trying to catch that cock.

One of the boys nearly had him, but just as he was about to close the bird rose and made a dive for the window, taking a big pane of glass out with him in fragments.

The boys suppressed their merriment, for they saw that old Thump was livid with rage, and if some one didn't get walloped it would be a miracle. He finally went to his desk and took another look so as to make sure that there were no other barn-yard specimens there, and becoming convinced that there were not, he sat down and glared at the cowering pupils.

"I'll give a ten-dollar gold piece if any boy will tell who put that rooster in there," said he.

The boys looked from one to the other, but they all looked so honest, surprised, and guiltless that the irate teacher was confounded. Come to think of it a little calmer, however, how was it possible that any of the boys could have done it, since only he and the janitor had keys to the school-room?

Finally he concluded to let the matter rest until he could consult with the janitor, and so he proceeded to open school.

The boys had all they could do to keep their faces looking anything like sober, but the Shorty Kids looked the most honest of them all.

On consulting with the old janitor afterward, he could throw no light on the subject. He knew that he hadn't put the rooster in his desk, and couldn't for the life of him see how anybody else could have done so.

This set Mr. Thump to thinking in the same vein he had been thinking in before, namely: how was it that none of these tricks were played before the appearance of the Shorty Kids? And how was it possible that they could do such things and keep such sober innocent-looking faces, to be, in short, such good boys and scholars, and yet be so bad.

Things went on while, he was trying to solve this conundrum and watching the three suspects, when one day little Cal received a letter from his mother with some pocket money in it for himself and the two other Kids, informing them that the Old Man was going to visit them the following week.

After having their heads together for awhile, Cal went and informed Mr. Thump of the great honor in store for him, assuring him that his father was not only a rich man, but a great orator, telling him to be sure not to let him go away without addressing the school, as he was anxious to show him off.

This was very pleasing to Master Thump, for he knew that his patron was a rich man, and he wanted to interest him still more in his school. So he resolved to receive him royally.

And by this time the Kids began to be understood by the boys of Mr. Thump's school, each one of whom voted them little bricks: little, but, oh, my!

They would meet nights in some one of the rooms, and there they would tell of rackets they had had at home with the Old Man, and finally the desire to see the old fellow became very great among them.

The next Saturday afternoon several of the boys, including the Kids, received permission to go to Hickory Point village, about a mile away, and a more gleesome lot of fellows were never given an outing or a holiday. They made their pocket-money fly, greatly to the delight of taffy shop-keepers and oyster saloons. In short, done just as any other boys would have done under the same circumstances.

But the three Kids patronized a toy shop where they bought eight or ten putty blowers, together with putty enough to serve them for some time. Only a select few knew what these were for, but as they were con-

traband at school, they had to be smuggled in with the utmost caution, but the Kids were equal to it and got them safely into their room unnoticed.

And in anticipation of a visit from the Old Man, Mr. Thump was in the best of spirits. He had never seen him, as Shorty and his wife had attended the placing of the Kids at school, and he was anxious to meet him.

Finally he came and was gladly welcomed both by the kids and their master, all of which made him feel very proud. He was escorted to Thump's private study where he held a sort of reception, glowing all over with good nature.

"Oh, sir, I am pleased to find your school so pleasantly situated. My son did not tell me half of it," said he, to Mr. Thump.

"Thank you, Mr. Burwick. I pride myself on having one of the finest boarding-schools in the State," said Thump, proudly.

"It seems so. And how are our boys getting on—poor fellows, how we miss them at home," he added, aside. "Are they good boys?"

"The best I have in school," replied Thump.

"Ah, that pleases me," said he, catching up his own kid and kissing him. "And do you like to stay here, boys?"

"Oh, yes, papa!" Cal answered for them all.

"Good!" said he, and then while the three little rascals were swapping winks on the sly, the Old Man and Mr. Thump were holding a private confab in one corner of the room, the Old Man assuring him that nothing must be spared for their comfort or education.

After dinner the Old Man was taken to the schoolroom to hear the recitations, that he might be the better able to judge of the progress of his own children but of the others as well.

So he was escorted to the seat of honor on a raised form, where the scholars had a chance to look at him, and it was with difficulty that they kept from laughing in his face, such a comical little old dumpyling was he; but Mr. Thump had his eagle eye on them, and they were restrained.

As for the Old Man, it was the proudest moment of his life. He had never occupied such a position before, nor would he have cared to then had his own flesh and blood not been there, for he wished to show them to what heights a boy may reach with goodness and industry.

Mr. Thump also felt that it was the proudest moment of his life, and he trotted out first one class and then another, and put them through a course of sprouts, giving each one a chance to show what he could do with reciting yesterday's lessons, he putting back them in this way to make sure that they would do credit to themselves and to their beloved teacher.

The scholars were delighted, and so was the Old Man at their proficiency.

The three kids had especially distinguished themselves, and the Old Man made up his mind to make them each a handsome present before he left, and to gladden the hearts of the other parents at home by his report of them.

The exercises over, the boys all returned to their seats, and the Old Man complimented Mr. Thump upon his school.

"And I shall not forget to report you as a successful teacher wherever I think it may do you any good," said he.

"Thank you, Mr. Burwick. I could esteem nothing higher than your commendation. And now will you kindly address the boys?"

"Eh?"

"Say a few encouraging words to them, for you know how young people like compliments."

"Yes, but I—I'm no speaker," he protested, coloring at the very idea of the thing.

"Oh, not a speech exactly, unless you choose to make one to them, but just a few remarks."

"Yes, but—"

Mr. Thump choked him off good-naturedly by going to the front.

"The school will listen to a few remarks by Mr. Burwick. Order!"

The expression on the Old Man's face was a study. So were the mugs of the boys.

He had never made a speech in his life, and how to begin he didn't know.

But he was in for it at all events, and as he did not want to appear weak before the Kids especially, he pulled himself together and waddled to the front of the form, while Mr. Thump retired up so as to give him room.

He was blushing like a school-girl and the boys were grinning like monkeys.

"Ara—" he began, then he hitched.

"Nowa—" and he hitched again, and the boys seemed ready to explode. Indeed, Mr. Thump could scarcely hold himself in sobriety.

But the Old Man didn't notice anything. He had more on his own mind than he could attend to. He began again.

"Ladies and gentlemen—I—I mean fellow citizens!" and this time he struck an oratorical attitude. "When in the course of human events—"

He was getting more deeply into the tangle than ever, and Mr. Thump, unable to stand it without laughing, which he did not wish to do in presence of the scholars, so he stepped into a side room.

"As I was saying, I am glad to see you. I was a—a boy once myself."

"Bully boy!" whispered some of the scholars, and a general titter ran through the school.

"All you have to do is to stick right to—to being boys, and it will make men of you. For instance, look at Daniel Webster!" he cried, striking a lofty Websterian attitude.

But just as he did so, he uttered an exclamation of

pain and surprise, for the balls from a dozen putty-blowers showered upon him.

He ceased oratory and yelled murder, but before Mr. Thump could rush upon the scene to ascertain the cause, every one of those putty-blowers had been passed to little Cal, under whose desk there was a knot hole, and were dropped out of sight into the cellar.

"He's got a fit!" cried little Peter Pad, rising up and shouting as Mr. Thump entered.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE spectacle that met Mr. Thump's eyes as he entered the room was a strange one.

There stood the Old Man clawing the air and evidently trying to imitate an Indian war-dance, during which he had lost his false teeth again.

The putty balls had hit him in the eyes, nose, mouth, ears, in fact, everywhere, and Mr. Thump could easily believe that he was having a fit.

And there was such a change in his face, too, and the boys were splitting with laughter as they beheld how comical his mug was without teeth.

"What has happened, Mr. Burwick?" asked Thump.

"Muf—fluf—wuf—chuf—flop—flop—smash," was the most intelligible answer he could give, for it will be remembered that he could not talk without his teeth, and he was too greatly bewildered now to know that he had lost them.

"Oh, papa, what has happened?" cried Cal, in pitiful tones, as he went to his assistance.

"Sit down there, all of you!" roared Thump, and the boys obeyed, but laughed behind their books.

"What has happened, sir?"

"Ah! here are your teeth, papa," said Cal, picking them up and handing them to him.

The Old Man snatched them and disappeared into an anteroom, where, after giving them a hasty wiping, he readjusted them and to that extent at least was himself again.

But he refused to continue his address to the scholars or to appear before them again. What had really happened he could not tell, but when Mr. Thump joined him he was picking the putty out of his ear and looking very mad.

Thump had also suspected putty, having found several pellets of it on the floor, but not a sign of it could be found about the boys or in their desks, and of course he never thought of going down cellar to look for evidence.

"I am extremely sorry, Mr. Burwick," said he, "to think that such an insult should have been offered to one of my guests. But, to tell you the truth, I think it came through the windows from some rogues outside not belonging to my school. But I shall find out, and you may depend upon it that punishment will follow."

"I hope so, and I am glad you do not believe that any of your boys did it," replied the Old Man, but within his heart of hearts he believed to the contrary, as Thump did himself; he actually believed that it was instigated by one of the kids, most likely his own son.

"Oh, that I am sure of almost. I have my scholars in such a high state of discipline that I am sure none of them would do such a thing. So please overlook it, and I assure you that it shall be avenged."

"Thanks."

"Would you like to see the lads before you go?"

"Well, yes. Send them in here to me," said the Old Man, with a grimness he could not control.

Two minutes later the three kids ran joyously into the anteroom where he was.

"Are you going, papa?" asked Cal, sadly.

"Yes, I am going, confound you three little rascals, and it will be a long time before you see me again, mind that."

"Why, what is the matter, papa?" asked Cal.

"Shut up, sir! You know very well what the matter is. Who blew those putty balls?"

"I didn't see any putty balls, papa. I thought the trouble was you had lost your teeth and it made you wild."

"I didn't see any putty-balls, did you, Ed?" asked Peter Pad.

"No. Guess it was in your mind, pop."

"No, sir; no, confound you, it was in my ears, my eyes—Look there!" he added, digging a piece of it from his west ear. "What do you call that?"

"Ear wax, arn't it, papa?" asked Cal, innocently.

"No, confound you, it is putty!" he roared.

"But where could it have come from?"

"You rascals probably know. But I am done with you. I came out here for the purpose of making it pleasant for you, but you undertook to make it pleasant for me, so remain where you are, and I shall give Mr. Thump orders to whale you upon the slightest provocation."

"That's all right," said Pete, with a laugh.

"Bet it is—ha! ha! ha!" added Ed.

"What is all right?" demanded the Old Man.

"Oh, perhaps you think we're slouches?"

"Yum, yum! and perhaps we arn't."

"What do you mean?" he demanded, somewhat disconcerted at their confident manner.

"Oh, never mind; you'll know all about it one of these days," said Cal, seriously.

The Old Man began to look worried.

"Avast there, shipmate!" said Pete, hitching up his trousers sailor-man fashion.

"Heave to and come aboard!" said Ed, going through the same pantomime.

"All hands on deck!" said Cal, and he in turn hitched his trousers larboard and starboard.

"What are you confounded monkeys doing, I'd like

to know?" asked the Old Man, looking wonderingly from one to another of the little rascals.

"Nothing now," replied Pete.

"No, not now," said Ed, significantly.

"Of course not," added Cal, and then they all three hitched up their trousers again.

"You are three little rascally guys!"

"Oh, well, you may think so now, but one of these days you won't," said Pete.

"You bet!"

"They won't any of 'em think we are fools after awhile," said Ed.

"Explain."

"What do you take us for?"

"Explain!"

"Give ourselves away! That's good!" and all three of them laughed derisively.

The Old Man was puzzled, and didn't know what to say.

What did they mean?

"Oh, well, boys, I don't blame you for having fun, but you shouldn't have it at my expense and before the whole school. But tell me what you are talking about."

About having some fun."

"In what way?"

"Running away," said Pete.

"Running away?" exclaimed the Old Man, starting back alarmed.

"You bet!"

"We're going to skip the gutter, papa."

"What nonsense is this?"

"We aren't going to be made prisoners of."

"Prisoners?"

"In this one-horse village."

"No, we are going to run away and go to sea, if you must know, so when you miss us you will know where we are."

"What a piece of nonsense! The idea of three little runts like you going to sea!" said he, laughing.

"Well, we're big enough for cabin boys."

"Oh, shut up such nonsense."

"All right. If we don't do it sooner we shall do it later, for we won't stand this," said Pete.

"Oh, pshaw! What, don't you like to stay here?"

"Oh, we're dead in love with it!"

"Perfectly delighted!"

"Charmed!"

"Oh, well, I didn't know that," said the old man, now considerably worked up.

"And didn't you just say you would leave us here to our fate and give old Thump orders to whale us at any provocation?"

"Oh, I was only joking. Here, here is some pocket money for you," said he, giving each of them a five dollar bill. "Now be good boys and we will have a talk at home about the matter and see if we can make it more pleasant for you."

This was what the little rascals were playing for. They knew that the Old Man was so mad after the putty ball racket that he would give them nothing unless they frightened it out of him in some way.

You see how they worked it.

They reluctantly pretended to be satisfied, and the Old Man took leave of them.

They returned to the school-room while he started for the railway station, not, however, entirely satisfied that there really was not some danger of the three kids attempting to carry out their threat sooner or later, for he knew they were brave, adventurous little fellows, and if laboring under the idea that they were being imposed upon, might do almost anything. He resolved to have a talk with Shorty and the Kid when he got home.

On their return to the school-room they found the master doing his best to unravel the mystery of those pellets of putty.

He was doing it with rather a bad grace, for he was prone to laugh over the comical circus quite as much as the scholars were, for never in all his experience had he seen such a funny sight as the Old Man was, both while attempting to address the school, and, after losing his teeth, trying to talk at all. He couldn't blame the boys for laughing, but at the same time he must maintain discipline.

But every boy was loyal. There wasn't a tattler in the entire lot, and so none of them would admit any knowledge of the racket.

"Do you know anything about that putty?" he asked, as the kids returned to the room.

"No, sir," they all said.

"Pop has fits sometimes when he gets excited, and then he always loses his teeth," said Cal.

"That's so," said the other two.

"But how about the putty balls?"

"We don't know, sir."

That might in most cases be accounted for on the score of childish love and enthusiasm.

But why had he urged it upon him to have his father make an address to the school?

He must have known what an ass at oratory the Old Man was, and that there would undoubtedly be some fun come out of it.

Was it true, as he asserted, that his father had fits?

But how about the putty balls?

In all its parts the conundrum proved too big for him, and after wrestling with it for some time, "catch as catch can," he gave it up.

Then remembering his dignity and the discipline he had always boasted of so much, he pulled a frown over his hard face (ugly enough without one) and proceeded to put the classes through a cold course of educational sprouts which effectually threw a cold wet blanket over their mirthful remembrances.

But after school they made up for it when they gathered on the play-ground, for there they could recall the whole affair and laugh over it to their heart's content, and they did it.

"If I had such a dad as that I wouldn't swap him for a cow," said Billy Hand laughing.

"What! we wouldn't take a drove of Texan steers for him," said Pete. "He's chuck full of fun."

"Good's a circus every day," added Ed, and then they all laughed some more.

But having settled things at the Hickory Point boarding school, let us follow the Old Man.

It had not been a very pleasant trip for him, and he heartily wished he had never made it.

"It is only some more of my confounded luck. Something is forever happening to me, do what I will," he mused, as he walked along toward the station. "But it would have been all right if I hadn't been such a bald-headed old ass as to attempt to address the school. Yes, there comes in that confounded 'if' again. If this, and if that, has always been my bane, especially since I years ago became reunited with my son and grandson. Since then, and since our mixed marriage relations, I have had my big foot in it fully one half of the time. I have sworn off repeatedly, but it's no use. I am too big a fool. What would the folks say if they should find out about this episode? Suppose those little rascals should give it away? I wouldn't have it for a thousand dollars. They would never stop laughing at me, and goodness knows they have enough on me to laugh at already. I wish I could go to a nunnery, or be confined in a lunatic asylum, or an idiotic asylum. Guess that would be the best place for me, come to think of it."

"Hello, boss!"

This salutation startled him from his cold reverie, and on looking up he found himself face to face with a tramp, and as about as ugly a one as he had ever seen.

"Well?"

"You look like a prosperous, well-fed citizen."

"Well, what of it?"

"Look at me."

"I don't care to look at you. You are not the most attractive-looking person I ever saw. What do you want?"

"A little equalization."

"What?" demanded the Old Man, starting.

"A little of which you evidently have much and I have none at all. In other words, you have money, I have none."

"Well, sir, that is not my fault."

"Perhaps not; it is a fault of society, and as I am an apostle of reform, I propose that we indulge in a little equalization."

"What is that you say?" the Old Man roared.

"Pray be calm, my dear sir. Nothing is ever gained by getting excited," said the tramp, in the coolest, most provoking way. "To come right down to business, be kind enough to give me some money."

"No, sir, not a cent!" said he, resolutely.

"Oh, yes, you will," chuckled the tramp.

"Not if I know myself," and he started to go.

"Stop! I insist upon it."

"Insist?"

"Yes."

"Well, take it out in insisting. Begone!"

"Not quite yet, my dear sir, not quite yet. I am stronger than you are—we are alone," said the rascal, advancing upon the Old Man.

"Oh, you are, eh? Are you stronger than this?" he demanded, pulling a bulldog revolver from the pocket of his overcoat.

That tramp wilted in an instant, and drew back a few paces.

"Oh, that puts another face on the matter. I didn't think you were so particular as to shoot over a little thing like this," said he.

"Oh, you thought I would stand right up and be robbed without a protest, did you? Now you light out on the double-quick, or I will bore a hole clean through you!" said he, quickly cocking his pistol.

"All right; good-day; I'm off," said the tramp, taking to his heels and running like a deer.

The Old Man's blood was up, and he could scarcely restrain himself from sending a shot after the rascal as he skipped away.

He watched him until he was out of sight around a turn in the road, and then let down the hammer of his pistol again.

"The rascally robber! It would have been a good thing for the community if I had shot him. I wonder what else is going to happen me to-day to commemorate this visit?" he muttered, as he resumed his journey to the station which was then nearly a mile away.

"By the way," he said, suddenly, pulling out his watch, "oh, thunder! I have only five minutes left on that rascal's account to reach the station. Oh, con-

found him!" he added, and then began to run as fast as his little short legs would carry him.

On he flew, looking neither to the right or the left, and puffing like a grampus.

He overtook a man trundling a wheelbarrow.

"Hey!" called the man.

"Go to blazes!"

"Say, mister, if yer'n a hurry to catch ther keers, I can wheel yer there quicker'n you can run!" he yelled, when he was a rod ahead.

There was an idea. He was nearly winded, and the man with the barrow was strong and long legged—perhaps after all he might give him a valuable lift.

"Say," said he, stopping, and between his puffs, "Wheel me to the station in time to catch that four o'clock train, and I'll give you a dollar."

"I'll do it, boss. Take a seat," said he, quickly.

It wasn't very dignified, but he wasn't thinking half so much about dignity just then as he was about catching that train; so he took a seat in the barrow, completely filling it, his legs hanging over in front, and away went the man as fast as he could run.

Now the roads were rather rough at that season of the year, and such a shaking up as the Old Man received he had never experienced before in the whole course of his life.

With one hand he held his hat in place, and with the other tried to keep himself from being shaken all to pieces.

But that yokel was a good one, and bound to win that dollar if he shook his passenger into a jelly, and he bounded five feet at every stride.

It was a terrible ride, but the fellow got there with him on time all the same, with nearly a full minute to spare.

"Here" said the Old Man, handing him his dollar.

"Thankee," said the countryman, pocketing the most easily earned dollar of his life.

"All right!" and the Old Man rushed into the station for his ticket, while the man with the barrow went off about his business with a grin on his homely mug that was worth seeing.

"Most car-time?" he asked of the station agent.

"Past car-time for to-day, boss," was the reply.

"What?" and the Old Man leaped a foot in the air.

"Accident up the road."

"Eh?"

"Accident up the road a few miles; train overdue, but will be here now in a few minutes."

"Oh!"

What a relief it was!

But when he came to think of his run and of that wheelbarrow ride—both of which had been for nothing, as it turned out—it made him feel sick.

But there was some satisfaction in the thought that he was not left, and that he would be home in time for dinner.

He paced up and down the platform of the station for ten minutes, when the train announced itself with a whistle, and soon came thundering up to the station.

There was considerable excitement on board, for the engine and baggage-car had jumped the track, and a great "catastrophe" had been wired to New York, when, in fact, no one had been seriously injured, and an extra engine was taking the train to its destination.

It was quite cool and the Old Man took a seat in front of the stove, while just behind him sat two ladies, each with a young babe.

Now, if anything catches the Old Man it is a pretty baby, especially if there is a pretty mother in charge of it.

Both of these mothers were young and pretty, and the subject of the railroad accident, together with his monkeying with the babies, brought them into conversation.

But they seemed very much worried about the report that might reach their husbands regarding the accident, for fear they might hear of it and become alarmed.

So they talked almost entirely to each other, leaving the Old Man to "tootsy-tootsy" and entertain the little ones.

Finally the ladies agreed that they would get out at the next station and telegraph to their husbands of their safety.

CHAPTER XVII.

"Oh, you little woutsey poutsey!" said the Old Man, continuing his play with the babies.

At this point the train slowed up, and presently stopped at the next station.

"Will you be so kind as to hold my baby while I go out and send a message?" said one of the charming mothers to him.

"Certainly, with pleasure," he replied, and she plumped it into his arms and made a rush for the platform.

"So kind of you, sir, but will you also hold mine while I go out and send a dispatch to my husband?" and without waiting to learn whether he had babies enough on hand, she hurriedly cracked her own into his lap and rushed out of the car and into the station after the other lady.

"Oh, you little tootsy wootsy! oh, you darling little hunky punkies! Coo, coo, cool! Too, too, too! Pretty baby buntins!" and a lot more of baby talk did he give those two kids while passengers were crowding into the car.

Presently, however, the train started, and was nearly under full headway before those mothers discovered the fact.

Then they rushed frantically out and shouted for the train to come back.

It didn't, and they proceeded to faint.

But how about the Old Man?

Was he fainting?

No, but he was looking anxiously around, don't forget that.

It was barely possible that they had got into another coach, and would soon enter his to claim their darlings.

His head bobbed first to one end of the car and then the other, but they came not.

Was it possible that the old "hold my baby, please," trick had been played on him double?

He began to get nervous and the babies to whimper, those whimpers being cautionary signals of a coming storm.

"Hush-a-by-baby, mamma come soon!" he tried to sing to them, but he didn't believe it all the same.

No; he by this time made up his mind that he had again been made a victim of, and, oh, he felt like chucking those kids out of the window and throwing himself under the train, that was by this time moving at a fearfully rapid rate to make up for lost time.

First one of the babies began to cry, and then the other jumped in on the chorus.

The Old Man said baby talk to first one and then the other as he held them on his two fat legs.

"By-baby-buntin', mamma gone a-huntin'— Oh, confound the luck! Did ever a man have it like me? To get a rabbit skin to— Oh, shut up! Confound the brats, they are old enough to know that I am not a nurse, at all events. Oh, why did I ever undertake this journey? It will be the death of me sure. Rock-a-by, baby, on the tree-top— Oh, I'd like to drop you out of a tree-top! When the wind blows— Oh, confound the wind; there's enough of it here. Shut up, or I'll throw you into the stove," said he, and by this time, what with his excitement and the heat of the stove, the sweat was running down his face in great rivulets.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, you old brute, to keep those babies before that roasting fire," said a snappish old woman, who sat further back, but whose shrill voice overcame the noise of the car.

"You go to thunder!" roared the Old Man, casting a glance around.

"Shame! Shame!"

"Whose funeral is this, yours or mine?"

"Your children are being cooked," said another of the passengers.

"All right, I hope they'll soon get done," said he, and then he commenced some more baby talk in sheer desperation, hoping to stop their yelling.

But they evidently weren't there to stop, but to keep a-going at their loudest.

"My friend," said another of the passengers, who had become interested, "if you take a seat further back it will most likely be better."

This seemed to be a sensible remark, and as he was already stewing himself and wanted to get where it was cooler, he took one of the yelling kids under either arm and moved back a few seats from the stove.

But by this time every passenger in the car had become interested in the Old Man and his situation, although the majority felt about the same as he did, and wished those kids in Jerico.

The babes looked up into his face, but it was so distorted with anger that they got frightened and again set up a yell.

He tried more nursery rhymes and baby talk, but all to no soothing purpose.

Then a story got started through the car that these babies had been picked out of the railroad smash-up, and that the old fellow was taking them to the city.

"Stole em, more like," snapped the acrid old woman who had before called him a brute.

"Well, he must be a hog if he wanted two such squealers as they are," said a bluff old fellow, just behind her.

"Men are bad—all of 'em!" said she, at the same time turning around and glaring at him with her little gray eyes.

"Did you ever have one, mam?"

"No, and I don't want one!" she snapped, as she whirled around again.

Still those stray young ones yelled.

Cunning or soothing words had no effect on them at all.

"They are hungry, I guess," said some one.

"That's it," thought the Old Man. "I say," said he, addressing the snappish old maid, "have you got a nursing-bottle with you?"

That acrid maiden leaped to her feet and lightning shot from her little gray eyes.

"You are an insulting old puppy, sir, and if there were any gentlemen in the car they would resent it, you shameless old hog!" she fairly screamed.

"I—I beg your pardon, madam, but the fact is these kids have nearly driven me crazy, and you being the only matronly-looking lady present, I—I didn't know, you know, but that—"

"Shut up, Sir Hog! I see there are no gentlemen present," she added, looking sneeringly around the car.

"And nary a lady!" said somebody, but she failed to locate the voice.

"I shall appeal to the conductor," said she, bouncing down into her seat.

"Hush-a-by-rush-a-by, baby go sleep," the Old Man sang to them the best he could, but that evidently wasn't their racket before refreshments, and the victim thought what cruel creatures those mothers were, if indeed they were the mothers at all, to abandon two such pretty babes in such a heartless manner. It almost moved his heart toward them in spite of all.

"In what way, madam?" asked the conductor.
"He asked me if I had a—nursing bottle."

"And didn't you happen to have one?"

This produced a roar that was heard above the rattle of the train, and that doubly insulted maiden tried to break the springs in her seat, so suddenly did she sit down.

She was ugly enough to do it, but was not quite heavy enough.

"Ticket," said the conductor to the Old Man.

Ticket! He had forgotten that he ever had one.

"Ticket, please," the official said again.

"Eh? Oh, yes," and believing it to be in one or the other of his vest pockets, he took both kids under one arm and felt for it.

It wasn't there, and he packed them both under the other arm so as to reach his left pocket.

It was a comical sight, but the Old Man did not feel a bit funny over it.

But finally he found the required evidence of having paid his fare, and it was punched.

"You seem to have your hands full," said the conductor, looking at the two babes.

"Hands! Say rather hands, arms and ears full."

"Where did you get them?"

The Old Man looked up at him.

"Oh, you are the conductor. Well, sir, I wish to protest against this outrage," said he, savagely.

"What outrage?"

"This one that has been played upon me, sir."

"Who played it on you?"

"Two women, passengers on your train, who got off one station this side of Hickory Point, saying they wanted to telegraph their husbands, and asked me to hold their babies while they did so. Same old game—eh, conductor?"

"Well, it looks like it. What are you going to do with them?"

"Why, I shall be obliged to take them to the city and turn them over to the police. I don't know of anything else to do with them."

"They've got good lungs," said the conductor, passing along, and that was all the sympathy he got.

A tall, ungainly man, holding on to the seats as he made his way, sat down behind the Old Man and his torments.

"What's ther matter with ther kids?" he asked.

"Hi pan tod," growled the Old Man.

"Hey?" The man was deaf.

"Measels."

"Hey?"

"Small-pox, confound you, small-pox," roared the Old Man at the bore.

"Hey?" and he held his hand to his ear.

"Oh, go to blazes! Confound you, haven't I got trouble enough on my hands without your putting your oar in? Bah!"

"Hey? Crazy?"

"Oh, will somebody take this lunatic away?" the Old Man roared.

"Hey?"

He could stand it no longer, and seizing the two kids, one under each arm, he went to another seat, using a string of words that were strong enough to break up a setting hen.

"Hey?" came again from that deaf man, who had risen up and stood looking after him.

"Will somebody shoot that old wax ear and do me a personal favor?" he cried.

Everybody laughed, but nobody offered to do him the kindness.

Meanwhile those two kids kept up their yelling, and several people had left the car and gone to others to avoid the concert.

But there was no escape for the Old Man. He appeared to be in for it on all possible occasions.

"Oh, Lord—oh, Lord!" he groaned, "what a poor unlucky cuss I am! Why did I ever come out here—why did I ever get into this car? Hush a by, baby, hush a by—hush a by! Oh, shut up! When are you going to run down? Won't it be a nice sight to see me going through the streets with this load of kids? I'll be hanged if I do it! I'll hand them over to the first policeman I meet."

He looked up and saw another man feeling his way toward him.

"Wonder if he wants to know what the matter is with the kids?" thought he.

"Ah, what is it—a two-headed baby?" asked the man, feeling around and giving evidence enough of being blind.

"Yes," grunted the Old Man.

"I thought so."

"Oh, you did, eh? What made you think so?"

"I recognized two voices, and knew they could not both come from the same mouth," said he.

"You have got a great head."

"Two-headed baby, eh? Wish I could see it. But all the beauties of this world are denied to the unfortunate blind," and he sighed.

The Old Man grunted "yes," and then he changed the position of the kids to see if that wouldn't change their tune, but it didn't.

"Taking it to the Dime Museum?"

"What! Oh, thunder! yes, Dime Museum," said the Old Man, and he couldn't help laughing in spite of all his afflictions.

"Make lots of money, I dare say?"

"Barrels of it."

"Help a poor blind man?" he asked, taking off his hat and holding it toward him.

"Great mother of the immortal Brigham, what next?" cried the Old Man, in his anguish.

Even the kids appeared to understand that their present protector was in trouble, for they ceased to whoop her up as they had been doing, and looked up into his face with sympathy, almost.

That caught the Old Man's heart.

"Please help the blind!"

"Well, hang me if I don't give you a quarter to see if it won't change my luck," laying one of the babies down on the seat so as to enable him to get at his change pocket.

"A quarter won't do it, boss," said the blind man.

"What?"

"Nothing short of a dollar will change the luck of a man with a two-headed baby."

This nearly made the Old Man lose his teeth again.

What detriment was it to a man to be blind if he possessed such a cheek?

"A what?" he finally asked.

"A dollar is the least that will change your luck."

"Will you give me instant evidence that my luck is changed if I give you a dollar?"

"How?"

"By getting up and getting away from me?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right. There is your dollar; now skip."

"Yes, sir; but you should not be so proud because you are the father of a two-headed baby. Never let good fortune puff you up," said he, pocketing the cash and feeling his way along.

"Worse and more of it!" sighed the Old Man. "Oh, will this train ever reach New York?"

He gathered the kids together again and tried to sort and straighten them out, for one of them had been lying upon the seat and the other had slipped down between his fat legs while he had been dealing with the blind man.

But this proved to be no easy matter, for both had lost their caps in the scrimmage, and, to tell the truth, about the only way they could be told apart was by their caps, both being girls, looking and being dressed just alike, and evidently very nearly of an age.

The Old Man had scarcely noticed this, but he saw they had lost their caps, and, taking them one at a time and holding it between his knees, he proceeded to tie them on again.

And there was an improvement in the conduct of the kids. Only one of them yelled at a time now.

He held one in each arm and tried to be as fatherly to the poor abandoned babes as possible, and sang more lullaby songs to them.

But they were evidently hungry, and could he have found a two-headed nursing-bottle, he would certainly have treated them.

Meantime, he could not look around without seeing his fellow-passengers either frowning or grinning at him, neither of which made him feel any more reconciled to his fate, as may be well believed.

"Wonder if anybody else wants to know what the matter is with these kids? 'Pon my soul, they are both quiet for a wonder! Poor little things! They are not to blame for being in the way, and being abandoned because of it. Rock a by baby on the tree top, when the wind blows the cradle will rock. Oh, shut up!" he added, for his singing had set them going again.

Just then a brisk young man approached and took a look at the two kids.

"Say, Old Man, going to play that pair?"

"What?"

"Gambling on that pair?"

"Yes," said he, sullenly.

"Bring 'em up to my house in New York, and I'll beat you for money."

"What do you mean?"

"I've got three of a kind; you've only got two. See?" he asked, laughing.

The Old Man couldn't help laughing with him, for he was evidently a jovial sport, and saw at once that he held a family hand that would beat his simple pair.

"Well, a pair is all I want. Thank goodness, I do not hold a full hand."

"Wish I did, and could find a sucker," said the man, walking away.

"That's right. Give it to me. I deserve it all, of course. Oh, if my wife should find this out!"

The babies were both nestled down now, and were quiet. If they would only remain so until they reached the city, he could turn them over to the police with an explanation, and get clear of further responsibility.

All at once he gave a sudden start.

"Confound the kids!" he hissed between his false teeth, and he nestled uneasily in his seat.

But there was no help for it, but, oh, oh, wasn't he mad?

Then another change came suddenly over the spirit of his uneasy dream.

He just then remembered that his wife had agreed to meet him at the depot with the carriage on his return.

"Now, by the great horn spoon, let me die!" said he. "I never thought of that until just this moment. Yes, she is to meet me at the station and take me home. Oh, misery! What in thunder shall I do with these babies? If they will only go to sleep I will leave them here on the seat. It is cruel, but I must do it in self-protection," and he fully made up his mind to escape the dilemma in this way.

But while all this has been happening to the Old Man, we know nothing of the doings of those agonized mothers.

The first thing they did, of course, when they found the train had left them and taken their babies along, was to faint.

Coming out of that, they cried, and it was a long time before the station-agent could make out what the matter was.

"Oh, never mind; take the next train. Be along in half an hour," said he.

"But our babies?"

"Our innocent darlings?"

"Where did you leave them?"

"In the hands of a short, fat, bald-headed old gen-

tleman, who volunteered to hold them for us until we got off and telegraphed our husbands."

"Oh, well, guess I can fix that for you," and being the telegraph operator as well as the station-agent, he began banging away at his instrument.

He was calling up three or four stations ahead of where the train was then, so as to make sure of heading it off, while the anxious mothers seemed ready to cry, or do almost anything in the world.

It was the most terrible thing that had ever happened to the two married sisters.

A minute or so later there was received by the station-agent and operator at Cuddyville this dispatch:

"Stop short, stout, bald-headed man with two infants on next train from here."

The operator showed it to old Puffs, the constable of Cuddyville, and he read it over three times, the station being quite as much his place of business as any other—more, in fact.

"So, so—a child stealer, evidently. Ah, Billy, they called up the right station, didn't they?" said he, with a haughty, officious chuckle.

"You are right, Mr. Puffs," said the agent, although he regarded him as a great bore.

"How long before she's due?"

"Any time now. Just left Stoneham."

"All right. You stand by the engineer to see that he doesn't move until you see me bring out the prisoner."

"All right."

"We'll show them how such business is done in these parts. Those New York chaps aren't the only officers in the State," and again did he frown as he consulted the dispatch.

It will be seen that it did not mention any criminality, but was a simple request to stop such and such a person with two babies.

But Puffs knew it all. It was undoubtedly a case of child-stealing, and this arrest should be the second rung in his ladder of official fame.

The whistle blew.

"Ah, there it comes!" and Puffs pulled himself together for the emergency, at the same time hinting to two or three of his cronies that they had better stand by him, for he might have a tough fight of it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE instant the train slowed up sufficiently, old Puffs, the constable, went in search of the "short, fat, bald old man, with two infants in his arms."

He chanced to enter the right car first, and had no difficulty in recognizing his man.

"Here, I want you!" thundered Puffs, at the same time snatching him out of his seat.

"Hold on there! What in thunder are you doing?" demanded the Old Man, standing there, with a squalling kid under either arm.

"I have an order for your arrest, so come right along and do not delay the train."

"Order for what?"

"Your arrest."

"What for?"

"Child stealing."

"What!" exclaimed the Old Man. "Insult added to injury!"

"Well, we can't add to this delay any more, so come along in the name of the law."

And seizing him by the coat collar, he rushed him out of the car upon the platform.

That explained matters to the passengers—the old man was a child-stealer.

They were scarcely out before the train started off with everybody looking back.

The loungers about the station gathered around the group. The Old Man was the picture of despair as he stood there with a yelling baby under either arm.

"It is a darned outrage, sir," said he to Puffs.

cord around its neck and strangle it?" said the Old Man, trotting the children.

"What a wretch you must be!"

"Well, say, what are you going to do with me?"

"Wait until the next train arrives and I'll show you what will be done."

"Are the mothers coming for these kids?"

"Don't question me, sir, it is against the rules. Justice will be done you, near fear."

"Well, say, can I get some milk around here anywhere? These kids are starving, and hang me if I have got anything about me but some cigars. Can't I buy them something?" he asked.

"Against the rules, sir. Law is law."

"And a donkey is a donkey wherever you find him," the Old Man retorted.

"Have a care, sir, have a care!"

"Oh, my dear sir, we are so sorry to have made you all this trouble, but we were left behind, as you know, and had to telegraph to stop you somewhere in order to regain our babies."

"You are such a kind, dear old gentleman, and you have been so good to them too all this time," said the other.

"Yes, only I had nothing for them to eat," said he, for now he was entirely mollified.

"All aboard!" said the conductor, who had already stopped too long, and they all started for the train.

The Old Man looked around for Puffs, to give him a parting shot, but he had faded, evidently seeing what an ass he had made of himself.

"Say," said he to the station-agent, "tell that constable that I am going to start a fools' gallery, and that I'll give ten dollars for his photograph to head the collection," and then he went into the car amid the

them apart, and for that reason, whenever they had them together, one or the other of them had a colored bow of ribbon or something of a distinguishing mark.

On this occasion it happened that the only distinguishing mark was the link-lined cap of one of them, while that of the other was white.

And it will be remembered also that the Old Man got them pretty badly mixed up while he had them in charge, and that in replacing the caps they had pulled off he exchanged the caps.

These were external appearances, but each of those mothers knew that one of the babies had a strawberry mark on its back, and the next morning when the possessor of the babe with the mark was giving it its bath, she suddenly discovered that there was no strawberry mark.

And at about the same time the other mother was doing the same thing, when she also discovered that



"Rock-a-by, baby, on the tree-top— Oh, I'd like to drop you out of a tree-top! When the wind blows— Oh, con-
found the wind; there's enough of it here. Shut up, or I'll throw you into the stove," said he, and by this
time, what with his excitement and the heat of the stove, the sweat was
running down his face in great rivulets.

"If I hadn't these kids, I'd like to take a fall out of you."

"The train will be here in a few moments," the operator whispered to him.

"Thank goodness! Oh, Heaven! I wonder where and what will be the end of this visit? It is no wonder I am bald and gray. It would have driven any other man into the cold and silent tomb. Hush-a-by, baby, mamma come soon," he added, cuddling them closer beneath his coat.

By this time there were at least twenty villagers gazing in at the door and the windows of the little railroad station at the supposed child-stealer, but not one of them thought to bring anything for them to eat. They were enjoying the show for nothing—they didn't care whether the animals were hungry or not.

"Train coming!" cried the station-agent, and the next minute the last train of the day came thundering up alongside of the station.

But it had scarcely come to a standstill when those two unhappy mothers rushed out upon the platform in a perfect frenzy.

"Where are our babies?" they both cried.

A dozen hands pointed them to the waiting-room, and thither they rushed, followed by the conductor.

"Oh, my darling!" cried one of them, snatching a kid from the Old Man.

"Oh, my precious one!" cried the other, following suit, greatly to the Old Man's delight.

"But where do I come in, ladies?" he asked, after they had hugged and kissed their babies for about a minute.

laughter of those on the platform.

He found the two mothers, and again they thanked him and explained the mishap. They were such a charming pair of young mothers, and the Old Man not only forgot all the misery he had endured on their account, but made them laugh while rehearsing the scenes and situations on his way to the station where he was arrested.

"We did not order your arrest—we simply told the operator to have you stopped so we might overtake you," said one of them.

"That is all right, ladies; I am only too glad to have been able to serve you."

Their husbands were waiting at the depot for them, somewhat alarmed to find they did not come on the train before; but away they went, after shaking hands cordially with the Old Man, chattering and promising to tell them the greatest romance of their lives.

The Old Man was so much behind time that his wife concluded not to wait, and, after being driven home, she sent the coachman back to wait until the last train came in.

So in a few moments he was spinning along toward home, with an opportunity of reviewing what had happened him on this short visit.

But the trouble growing out of the affair did not end for the two mothers even when they got their babies back.

It will be remembered that they were both girl babies, looked very much alike, and were of about the same age. In fact, the mothers could scarcely tell

there was a strawberry mark on the back of her babe. Both screamed at the same moment, and both understood the situation.

Both mothers hustled those babies into their duds, got into their own with all possible haste, and each set out for the other's home to effect an exchange of darlings.

Both missed each other on the first, as they also did on the second attempt to make connection, and it was nearly night before the two women got their babies back.

All of which might not have happened if the Old Man had not made that visit to the kids at Hickory Point.

Well, naturally enough, the family was very anxious to hear from him how the boys were getting along at school, for, to tell the truth, every one of those parents felt lonesome without the presence of the three kids in the household, notwithstanding the mischief they cut up.

"Oh, they are improving in their studies, but— he began to say, and then he faltered.

"But what?" they all asked.

"Well, I don't know as it is going to help their morals much," he added.

"What isn't?"

"Being there."

"Well, explain," said his wife.

"Yes, soy what's der mat?" asked the Kid.

"Well, I suspect there is just as much mischief going on at that school as at any other, only it is more on the sly."

These parents exchanged serious looks without making any comments.

"And what is more?" said he, then hesitated.

"Well?" they asked, after awaiting awhile for him to proceed.

"I suspect that they are the leaders in it."

"What?"

"But they keep well under the rose."

"Why, cert," put in the Kid, while Shorty looked more in sorrow than in anger.

"But strange, high jinks have been cut up there since their going there—things that have never happened before. Mr. Thump confided this much to me, although he was free to admit that he had no evidence against our boys, only that everything was very peaceful and orderly before their arrival."

The Kid poked Shorty in the ribs, but that individual was not in the vein of looking upon the matter

"Cert, he's der boss monk," added the Kid.

"Me, sir! What do you mean, sir?" roared the Old Man, glaring at them.

"Well, soy, aren't you the riginator of ther mob? Ther bad blood all comes from you, and unless you can dig up your dad an' lay ther whole business ter him, yer must shoulder it."

"Thunder and blazes, sir! I have always been an honest, sober citizen, sir. I never did a disgraceful thing in my life, sir. I never resorted to your style of monkey business, sir," he howled.

"How about the surveying snap at Trinity Church?" ventured Shorty.

"Oh, that was only a little diversion."

"Yes, you looked very much diverted when that sucker yanked you out of the church and tried to print his monogram on you with his boot," laughed Shorty.

"It has been all misfortune since your son found you, has it?" she asked, severely.

"Oh, no, certainly not, so far as you are concerned. I was speaking of George and Charley."

"I think I'll take Cal and get a divorce," said she, petulant'y.

"What?" exclaimed the Old Man.

"I think it would be a good thing for all of us to do," said Shorty's wife.

"No good," suggested the Kid.

"Why not?"

"Because you've all got der vaccinate."

"What do you mean?"

"We've all got a pieces of der bad from der Ole Man, an' takin' away der boys only takes away pieces of der Ole Man."

"That's so," mused his wife.

"Bah! You are all talking like a pack of infernal



Seizing him by the coat collar, he rushed him out of the car upon the platform. That explained matters to the passengers—the old man was a child-stealer.

as a joke. It looked to him as though he was on the point of getting paid back for all the mischief of his life.

"What did they say?" asked the Kid's wife.

"Well, they said they were kicking."

"About what?"

"Staying there."

"Oh, of course," said Shorty.

"And they are talking about running away and going to sea."

"What?" cried all three of the wives, and there was consternation in every face.

"Running away and going to sea?" the three mothers said in chorus.

"Yes."

The three mothers leaped to their feet and screamed. Shorty and the Old Man looked sober, and the Kid laughed heartily.

"Nice lot of sailors they'd make!" said he.

"Don't burst your apron-strings, girls," said Shorty, seeing their excited state.

"Oh, you shnt up. It isn't the poor dear children's fault at all," said the Kid's wife.

"Of course not," said Shorty's wife.

"No, they inherited everything from their fathers."

"Yes, yes, yes!" they all said, together.

Then those three fathers rose up.

"From us?" asked Shorty.

"Yes."

"None of mine in it."

"Me, too."

"But we say yes," said they, but all the while the Old Man was saying nothing.

"Dad's ther one that's bad," said Shorty, pointing to the Old Man.

This rather staggered the Old Man, for it had not as yet been known in the family.

"But it is a shame to blame those poor dear children for the faults of their fathers," said Shorty's wife, while the fathers were glaring at each other.

"For their grandfather's faults," said Shorty.

"Cert. His nibs is de first end man of der combination. All his fault," said the Kid.

"Oh, yes. That is very generous and brave to lay all the bad to me. What was I before you unfortunately found me?"

"Give it up. Toughest old find ever I had," said Shorty.

"I'll tell you what I was; I'll tell you all. I was a retired, sober, honest gentleman."

"Got a written 'character' from anybody?" asked the Kid.

"I was at peace with all the world, living only to spend my money and repent the follies of my youth."

"Oh, then you had follies, eh?" asked his wife.

"The answer is there," said he, pointing to Shorty. "But I should have lived in peace and plenty and died happy, but for his finding me out."

"Tough old find!"

"Yip. Yer bet."

"Since then what has followed? See all that I have been put through and endured when I—"

"Well, soy, yer gettin' reflective," said the Kid.

"How so?"

"If Shorty hadn't found yer, yer'd never have found yer wife. How's that?"

The Old Man glanced at her and was not slow to see that she had taken the same idea of it. So he weakened slightly.

"Idiots!" roared the Old Man, unable to stand it any longer, and making a break for the door he vanished from the room.

Of course they all knew that the Old Man had not told everything relating to his visit to the school, but they gathered quite enough from what he did say to comprehend the fact that the kids were just as full of the Old Boy there as anywhere else.

And this was disappointing, for they had all made up their minds that what they needed was discipline, and they believed they would get it at Hickory Point in doses strong enough to cure them. But now it looked as though they were getting the best of the disciplinarian.

"I shall remove Peter from there," said Shorty's wife.

"And I shall take Ed away," said the Kid's wife.

"Ditto here on my earling California," said the Old Man's wife, after which they all swept from the room without further words, leaving Shorty and the Kid looking stupidly in each other's faces.

"Well, here's a go," said Shorty.

"More like a come, I think," replied the Kid, and for quite a while nothing more was said.

But it was evident that they were thinking good and strong all the same.

"That Pete will be ther death of me," said Shorty, walking to the window, demurely.

"An' dat Ed'll down me, sure," said the Kid.

"It was bad enough bringing you up, and ther only consolation I find is that your Ed'll give you something like you gave me."

"An' Pete, he's payin' you up for yer rackets on pop. Dat's all right; dat's hunk all round," said the

Kid, laughing. "But, soy, what's Cal payin' der ole man for?"

"For being at the head of the Shorty family, I guess. Dad looks all broken up, and I'll bet those kids put up some racket that made it very pleasant for him."

"Wish I knew."

"I don't. I'm sick of it all. We've had a ship load of fun, to be sure, but these three rascals are the worst I ever knew. What in thunder shall we do with them? I don't want 'em home, not if I stay here, an' now the women folks are gyrating around on their ears and threaten to have them home again."

"Oh, dat's pop's monkey business 'bout their runnin' away an' goin' ter sea. Soy, I'll bet a ten dat they give him dat ghost ter work a point."

"Oh, I dare say. They're liable to do anything, especially with their Old Man, and he gets frightened

"How was it?" asked the mothers.

"They wanted more pocket money and I thought they had enough, so they gave me that sea story to frighten me into giving them some more."

"And did you?"

"I—I did," said he, and they covered him all over with a laugh.

CHAPTER XIX.

YES, the laugh was on the Old Man again on account of his owning up about how the kids worked him out of generous sums of pocket money, hinting that they would run away from school and go to sea.

But if he had told everything relating to that visit to the kids at the boarding-school at Hickory Point, the laugh against him would have lasted until this time.

happy as Ginger served them with breakfast, and each was reading his favorite morning paper at the same time.

"I say, what's the matter with taking in the Dog Show to-day?" asked Shorty, looking up from his paper.

"Dogs!" exclaimed the wives. "Bah!"

"Dogs good 'nough for me," said the Kid.

"I'll take the dog show in mine," said the Old Man.

"I am very fond of dogs."

The wives agreed that dogs were all very well in their place, but that they didn't care to be in the place where the dogs were.

If their husbands wanted to go to the show, all right, but none for them. They were going to see a crazy quilt show; that was good enough for them, and so it was settled.

About eleven o'clock they all rode down to Madison



They followed behind with their laughter and wild comments, when one of the larger of them ventured up behind the Old Man and kicked him, while his companions sent up a yell and the Old Man whirled indignantly about.

and gives the whole business away just as he sees it. "I'm tired of the whole business," said he, ramming his hands into his trousers pockets and walking up and down the room.

"Spar de rod, spile de chile, you know," said Ginger, who had been at work in the room all the while without their noticing him, so intent were they upon their family troubles.

"Yes, Ging, yer a livin' example of dat," said the Kid, the first to reply.

"De rod war neber spar'd on me, an' I growd up smartin' in de straight an' narrer path," said he.

"Oh, give us a rest!" said Shorty, petulantly. "Let's go see ther Old Man," and together they started, leaving old Ginger gazing after them.

"Dar you are, chillun. You uns hab played de debel fo' many a long yeah, an' now de chickens you hab hatch am comin' home to roost. I often tolle yer dat yer get you comeuppance af' you die, ar' den you up an' play some joke on me to pay fo' my prophesy. Oh, yah, yah, oh, January, Trouble am a comin' fo' de ole black cat," he added, half dancing about the room while at his work.

Reaching the Old Man's parlor, they found him and their wives in solemn conclave. But he had in the meantime taken a gentle tumble to himself in the face of the threat to bring the kids home, and now he was endeavoring to smooth over the furrows he had made in those mothers' hearts.

"Oh, they're all right," said Shorty, putting in his ear as the tide turned.

"Cert," added the Kid.

"Oh, yes, they are getting along first rate and have all they want, and now I understand why they gave me that yarn about running away."

He, however, wisely drew the line at the strategy of the kids in worming pocket money out of him, and he did it, and owned up in such a way as to put the household in good humor once more. And before the hour of retiring came all hands were feeling so happy that when Shorty brought out his renowned and old time banjo and struck up a joyful old jubilee dance, one and all jumped in and kicked the dust out of the carpet right merrily.

Even the Old Man "got in," and for a few moments the scene resembled the wildest kind of a strictly domestic can-can.

Outside of the parlor in the entry old Ginger was putting in a few "licks" all by himself, for he could never resist the enchantment of Shorty's banjo.

And thus ended the whole business for the time being, and all retired for the night smiling and happy.

Indeed, this is not so much of a wonder, for ever since we have known them it has always been a remarkably cold spell when any family trouble in the Burwick household lasted longer than a single day, as it did not in this instance.

Old Ginger could hardly make it out. He expected a rupture in the family on account of the kids, but when he saw all that sorrow melt away before the music of a banjo and into a lively dance, it rather got the best of the coon.

"But it am der quarest family dat de Lord eber made an' got togeder," he mused. "Dey is allus up an' very seldom down, but when dey do get down, dey gets right up again."

Ginger embodied much truth in a very few words. He knew them.

Well, the next morning they all met in the breakfast room as usual, and each one of them seemed

Square Garden to visit the great Dog Show, all three of them feeling as fine as new silk hats, especially the Old Man, who prided himself somewhat on his knowledge of dogs, although, in fact, he knew nothing about them.

It was the last day of the show, and there was considerable interest manifested by fanciers, for several of the prize-winners were to be sold at private sale.

Shorty and the Kid soon lost the Old Man, for they were runts in the crowd, and he was not tall enough to get a very good view of his surroundings.

But they enjoyed the exhibition all the same, and went on doing so without thinking of the Old Man, who was old enough to look out for himself.

Of course there were drummers there for dogs that were for sale, and of course one of them, at least, fell on the Old Man.

This one was a regular sport, dressed in the loudest kind of clothes, and after watching the Old Man for a while, he knew there was meat in him. So he approached him.

"Soy, begs pardon, boss, but yer loves dog meat, I know it!" said he.

"What!" exclaimed the Old Man, starting back and glaring at him.

"Fact. I knows it."

"I love dog meat?"

"Oh, I means dog," said the sport, laughing.

"Oh, ah!" and the Old Man smiled.

"Dog is meat, eh? Dog meat. See?"

"Yes, certainly, very good," replied the Old Man, as the fellow poked him in the ribs.

"Right?"

"Certainly."

"Love dogs? Why, in course per does. Every thoroughbred gentlemen loves dogs. Got any?"

"Got a Newfoundland in the country."

"Ah, Newfoundlands all very well, but what you want right here in the city is a thoroughbred bull. See?"

"A bull!"

"Bull dog. See?" said he, emphasizing the remark by poking the Old Man's chest with his finger.

"What in thunder do I want of a bull dog?"

"For lots of things."

"Well, I'd like to know one reason."

"What! you, a solid American citizen, a man of refinement, don't know why you should own a bull dog? I'm surprised. Haven't you any pride?"

"Well, I dare say I have," replied the Old Man, moving slowly away, only to be followed by the sport, however.

"Ah! there you are! I know'd you had pride. Can see it stickin' out all over you. Now you wouldn't own a common horse or a common dog. What you want is the best breeds of animals. You want a prize-winner. See?"

"Well, of course, if I was going to buy a dog, I should prefer a prize-winner," replied the Old Man.

"Ah! there you are—there you are! Didn't I gauge you right up? Come right this way till I show you a prize-winner," said he, and taking the Old Man by the arm, he hustled him along until he stood in front of an exhibit consisting of a solitary white English bull dog, who got up and wagged his thin tail in welcome to his friend, while he kept a pair of wicked eyes on the Old Man.

"There you are, mister—my dog 'Knobs,' and, as you see by the medal around his neck, he is a first prizer—aren't you, 'Knobs,' old boy?" he added, patting the big head of the ugly brute.

The dog sat upon his haunches and seemed to taper from his huge head back to the tip of his tail, with a mouth on him like a sculpin's, and altogether the homeliest brute ever seen.

Of course the dog never received a prize; but it is a trick of some sports to have counterfeit medals ready to place upon their dogs after the awards have been given out so as to effect a sale. This was the case in this instance.

"Thoroughbred English bull of the first class. Best watch dogs in the world, best fighters ever bred, and always true to their masters."

"Is he kind?" the Old Man ventured.

"Kind? Just like a kitten, my dear sir. Been brought up with my children, and killed a big cat when he was four months old, just because the cat scratched my little boy. There's the sort of a dog you ought to have. He will not only satisfy your pride as a prize animal, but your ambition for a gamey one. I trust you will excuse me," he added, wiping his eyes. "I don't feel much like talking dog to-day."

"Anything wrong?"

"Well, my poor wife died this morning, and that is why I talk in these broken accents about selling my beautiful dog. I must raise the money needed for the funeral, otherwise I would never part with my beauty until he had chawed up half the game dogs in New York."

And again he veiled his emotion behind a handkerchief.

The Old Man was tender-hearted at all times, and this bit of acting touched him.

"Well, such is life, and we must be resigned. Tears will not bring back our loved ones. Take that beautiful dog, my friend, and you shall have him for a paltry hundred dollars. My poverty and not my greed compels me," as Shakspeare says."

"But I—"

"There he is, adorned with his prize medal and with his new collar and chain. Take him and the prayers of a poor man give your bargain luck."

"But, my dear sir, I—"

"Mind you, poverty is no disgrace, but it is the inconvenience attending it that bothers me. Poor 'Knobs!' how little Bobby will miss you," he added, patting the dog's head. "Cheap as dirt, sir."

"Can I lead him by that chain?"

"Just as easily as Mary led her little lamb."

"Well, seeing you are in trouble, I'll buy the dog. Make me out a bill of sale," said he.

"All right, sir. You'll never regret it," and taking out his note-book, he wrote out a bill of sale in good shape, signing it "Harry Jennings," to give it greater weight.

"There you are—Mr J. Burwick bought at the dog show of Harry Jennings one two-year-old white thoroughbred, English bull-dog, 'Knobs,' winner of the first prize of his class, \$100. All right, I thank you very much, and with this money I hasten to my stricken home. Here, 'Knobs,' get down here, old boy. Sorry to part with you, but fate wills it so. Here is your new master; be true to him, 'Knobs,' and good-bye. Good-bye, Mr. Burwick," and waving his hand, he turned to leave the garden.

I cannot say that the Old Man was delighted with his bargain, for it did not please him, and was anything but handsome. But he felt that he had done a kindly act, and if he didn't want the dog he could give him to some friend.

This was enough to satisfy him, and so he took the dog-chain in his left hand and started to finish his visit among the other dogs.

"Knobs" seemed to enjoy his liberty very much indeed; in fact, too much; for he didn't wait to see which way his new master was going, but darted here and there, between one pair of visitor's legs and around another one's, giving the Old Man more trouble than he could attend to, and creating enemies wherever he went.

But he had not progressed far, or seen much of the show, when he met Shorty and the Kid.

They met him just as he was apologizing to a man whom "Knobs" had upset, and when they saw the "pup" he had, they roared.

"Where did you get it, dad?" asked Shorty, between his laughing.

"What is it?" suggested the Kid.

"Oh, you fellows will laugh, of course, at anything I do. Look at that bill of sale," said he, handing it to Shorty.

"That's no dog, it's a guy."

"Looks like a sculpin on legs."

"Say, what a fine open face he has got!"

"What are yer goin' ter do with him, pop—get up a dog fight?"

"No, sir, you know I never engage in such brutal pastimes. I'm going to take him home for a watch dog."

"An open-faced watch dog?"

"Oh, I don't want to hear your chaffing," he said presently, and started on.

They roared as they saw that big bull dog pull the Old Man along, making him go wherever he wanted to.

But he had not gone many yards when "Knobs" made a break and grappled with a bull terror belonging to somebody else, and in less time than it takes to write it each of the dogs had dragged his master and several others into the muss, and one of the liveliest free-for-all, chaw as you please dog fights was started that was ever seen anywhere.

Women screamed and ran, boys sicked them on, while the owners were trying to pull them apart.

The crowd quickly formed a circle amid the greatest excitement, while nearly every game dog in the show was trying to get away and get in.

Four or five of them succeeded in doing so, and then the uproar became terrible.

The Old Man lost the hold he had upon the chain, was tumbled over three or four times, clubbed by a policeman who was trying to restore order, and was glad to escape with his life.

It took five or six policemen to restore order, and it wasn't done even then until "Knobs" had been clubbed until he didn't resemble a dog at all, after which he made a way for himself out of the nearest door and faded at the toe of a boot.

The other dogs were soon got back in place again, but for the little while it lasted it certainly was the liveliest episode of a dog show ever seen.

The Old Man thought so as Shorty and the Kid helped pull him out of the conflict.

They stood him up and looked at him.

Everybody else looked at him too.

And he was a sight to behold.

His new silk hat was smashed until it looked more like a concertina than anything else.

His coat was ripped up the back clear to the collar, his necktie was sprung and both ends of his shirt-collar stuck out at right angles, and there was a look of breakage and wildness all over him.

But he looked only a trifle worse than the fellow who owned the other dog, only that fellow had his dog at the end of the fight and the Old Man hadn't.

Where, oh, where was that hundred dollar dog?

The Old Man didn't appear anxious to find out. Indeed, he only appeared anxious to get out of sight.

So Shorty and the Kid assisted him to one of the retiring-rooms and sat him down to pull himself together, while they went in search of "Harry Jennings" and further particulars.

They were not long in finding out that the celebrated dog fancier had not exhibited anything at this show; that no such a dog as "Knobs" had been awarded a prize, and that the fellow who had sold the dog was a sharper on the outside.

These were unwelcome facts for the Old Man, but it was only a piece of his luck, and all he asked of his sons was that they get a carriage and take him to his tailor's and say nothing about it at home.

Thus they proceeded to do, but how they did laugh at the old fellow in the meantime.

"You say we are always putt'ng up jobs on you; did we put up this one?" asked Shorty.

"Don't say a word! I'm a fool. Something is sure to happen to me if I make a single move. I'm going to have myself shut up so I can't get into trouble," said he, ruefully.

Of course the dog got away and naturally returned to his original owner, a hundred dollars winner.

Yes, it was only a piece of the Old Man's luck, and he was sincere, as he had been a dozen times before, when he vowed that he would never attempt to do anything again requiring more brains than it would to buy a bunch of matches or a cigar.

But Shorty and the Kid kept the secret for their own private laughter, as they had agreed to do, although they would worry the Old Man sadly now and then by hinting so close at the occurrence in the presence of the ladies.

And yet, like dozens of other things quite as bad on him as this one was, it was soon forgotten and the Old Man smiled again like a big sunflower, making in the meantime one or two preliminary visits to the Long Island farm to give orders about the early spring work.

Yes, spring was at hand, and his heart was made buoyant by it, and other members of the family frequently caught him waltzing around and singing "Spring, Spring, Beautiful Spring," even although she was at this time a cold-blooded maiden, and seemed as much inclined to sit in the lap of winter as to strike out for herself.

It was too early, of course, to go to the country to live, but the Old Man was chuck full of new projects for the farm. But neither Shorty nor the Kid cared a snap for it until the hot weather came.

As for the wives, they were anxious to get there early enough to superintend their flowers, and besides that, the kids would join them there, it having

been agreed that they should leave the school as soon as the family moved to the country.

"Yes, Ginger, we have concluded to take you with us to the country this year," said the Old Man, as they were speaking together one day.

"Who took car de house?"

"Mrs. Curtis and Mary can do that. Yes, we want you with us in the country."

"All right, boss. I s'pose de country will be good fo' me," replied the coon.

"Yes—and you will be good for the country."

"Gwine fo' ter hab dem yer kids dar?"

"To be sure. The dear boys will be with us all season."

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Ginger.

"What's the matter with you?"

"Nuffin, only dar'll be de debil ter pay all de whole time fo' shuan."

"Ginger, you are mistaken. The dear boys have greatly improved under the discipline of the school at Hickory Point, and are now as gentle as lambs."

"Lambs!" and Ginger rolled his eyes up to the ceiling and drew a long breath.

"Oh, yes. You'll be surprised to see what a change for the better there is in them."

"An' dar's plenty room fo' it," muttered Ginger, as he walked away about his duties.

Yes, the Old Man was brim full of it, and the next morning he told Shorty that he was going over to the horse market, on Forty-ninth street, to buy a plough horse, as one was needed on the farm, and invited both he and the Kid to accompany him.

Of course neither of them cared a snap about the plough horse he was after, but as the mart was only a short distance away and they had nothing else particular on hand, they said they would go.

They saw by the Old Man's growing enthusiasm that there was fun ahead such as they had enjoyed the two summers last past, and it warmed the mischievous rascals into wanting to go to the country again.

An hour or so later they all three started for the stable, the Old Man walking in the middle, with Shorty and the Kid on either side.

When a few blocks away from home, Shorty took a card from under his overcoat, arranged with a pin hook by which it would hang anywhere.

They were just approaching a group of bootblacks who were skylarking on the corner, when Shorty slyly hung the card on the Old Man's back.

On it these words were printed:

"KICK ME. I'M IN A HURRY!"

The Old Man never suspected anything, and was gabbling away about the horse and what he proposed to do on the farm, when the gamins caught sight of the sign and sent up a yell.

They followed behind with their laughter and wild comments, when one of the larger of them ventured up behind the Old Man and kicked him, while his companions sent up a yell and the Old Man whirled indignantly about.

Of course the boys all ran and yelled, but the appearance of a cop on the next block put an end to their part of the fun.

"What in thunder was that for?" demanded the victim.

"Oh, only a lot of bad boys," said Shorty, and they continued their walk, although the Old Man was very mad.

"The rascals! They know when there's no officer around," he muttered, and presently a brisk young fellow turned out of a side street, and seeing the sign on the Old Man's back, exclaimed:

"Certainly; anything to oblige," and he therupon gave him a good smart kick. "No thanks. That's all right; always like to help people along. Ta, ta," and before the Old Man could recover from his astonishment the obliging young man had faded from view.

"Zounds! what does this mean? This is the second time I have been kicked within five minutes. It's an infamous outrage. Where are the police?"

"Guess they belong to a foot-ball team," suggested Shorty.

"And do they take me for a foot-ball?" he raged.

"What's the matter with a car if you're in a hurry?" asked a man whom they passed just then. "Sorry I can't assist you, but I'm lame," he added.

"What in thunder does he mean, I wonder?" But as they were nearing the sale stables, Shorty removed the card and put it out of sight.

Five minutes afterward the thing was forgotten by the victim, who found himself in the midst of horses, and he was all absorbed in finding one that suited him.

This he finally did and purchased him, after which Shorty and the Kid said they had engagements up-town and left him to return home alone.

But just before parting, while outside of the sale stable, Shorty again attached the card to the Old Man's back, with the idea that still more fun would come from it.

CHAPTER XX.

THE Old Man, proud of the bargain he had made in buying the farm horse, started for home all unconscious of the card on his back.

But he had gone only a few rods, when another young man came up behind him and treated him to a good kick, then said:

"That's all right. Glad to help a fellow any time."

"What in thunder do you mean, sir?" roared the Old Man, who had now been kicked several times in the most mysterious manner.

"Only accepting your invitation. Wish I was in good condition or had a mule to lend you. Day-day," and the man rushed merrily and briskly along.

"Oh, if I could only find a policeman!" howled the

victim, looking in all directions for one. "I—I'd have that fellow arrested. What in thunder do they all mean by kicking me? What have I done?" and not being able to say, he walked slowly onward.

But it was only a little while before he was surrounded by a howling mob of boys, one or two of whom ventured to kick him, as requested.

This was too much and he shouted for the police, seeing he could not catch his tormentors; and, strange to say, an officer promptly responded.

"What's der matter?" he demanded.

"Officer, I am a gentleman, but on some account or other I have been assaulted several times, and I demand protection," said he.

"Soy, what's der matter wid youse?" asked the officer, whirling him around while the crowd sent up a rousing cheer.

"There's nothing the matter with me, sir."

Shorty and the Kid had not yet returned, so he removed one of the billiard balls from the table and substituted the one he had purchased for an object.

The jokers returned soon after, however, but not caring to meet the Old Man just then, they went up to the billiard-room, where they spent the most of their time when at home, and took off their coats for a game.

The Old Man was watching, or, at least, listening for something where he could overhear what passed between the boys.

"Wonder where his nibs is?" asked Shorty.

"Got kicked outer town maybe," said the Kid, and they both laughed.

"Oh, he did, hey?" mused the Old Man.

"Wonder if he tumbled?"

"Well, didn't he?" he mused.

"That was a great snap," said Shorty, and at that

"I should say so," added the Kid.

"What nonsense!"

"The idea of an ivory ball exploding!"

"You must be crazy."

"Well, if I hadn't seen it I should think so, too. But I drove the white against the red, when there was an explosion," said Shorty.

"And ruined everything," said his wife.

"Here—how many balls did you have?" asked the Old Man.

"Three."

"Well, here they are," he said, picking them up and placing them on the table.

Both Shorty and the Kid approached with caution and took a look at them.

There was no mistake about it. All three of the balls were there intact.

What the blazes did it mean, anyhow?



He shudderingly got into the tramp's duds, while the tramp arrayed himself in his, even to the hat, handing him the worst looking old cady he had ever seen in exchange for his own new one.

"Well, what's der matter wid dat sign?" he asked, taking it off and holding it up.

The Old Man was paralyzed and the crowd yelled.

"Kick me, I'm in a hurry!"

"Why wouldn't yees get kicked when ye wear an invitation loike that?"

"How came it there?"

"How shud Oi know? There it is, an' if yees arn't a crank, somebody has been makin' a fool av yees. Git out o' that!" he added, yelling at the crowd that was now pressing closer.

"I guess I know who did it, officer. No wonder I have been assaulted. But I'll have revenge, mind that. I guess I'll take a car and escape the crowd."

"That's ther best thing yees can do. Oi'll kape this soign an' maybe ther'll be more fun come out av it some toime forinst this."

"All right, officer, I have had it as long as I want it, and had all the fun out of it I care for. Oh, won't I give it to those rascals!" he added, as he boarded a horse car.

"Oh, the rascals!" he kept saying to himself, as he rode toward home. "Won't I make them weary for this? Well, I'll leave it to them if I don't."

He had several blocks to walk after he reached his street, and all the while he was trying to think up something that would enable him to get square with Shorty and the Kid.

At length he hit upon it, and instead of going home, he went to a certain dealer in mechanical toys of whom he had heard, and of him bought a ball that looked for all the world like an ivory billiard ball, in weight and size to correspond with Shorty's.

This he took home with him.

instant there was a greater one, for as he spoke he gave one of the balls a smart punch, sending it against another.

Instantly there was a fearful explosion, or, at all events, a loud one. The glass was blown from the windows of the room, the chandelier over the table was wrecked, the green cloth ripped in half a dozen directions, and yet there was no smoke or smell.

But Shorty and the Kid, after picking themselves up, didn't stop to see whether there was or not, but they clawed out of the room as fast as ever they could go, nearly frightened to death.

The whole household was alarmed, and ran wildly to the billiard-room to find out what had happened.

The Old Man was with the foremost.

"What is it? What has happened?" asked half a dozen different ones at once.

"Keep back—keep back!" cried Shorty.

"Yes—something else might go off," said the frightened Kid, in dead earnest.

"What nonsense is this?" demanded the Old Man, starting for the billiard-room.

His wife and the others attempted to dissuade him. But he knew the danger was over, and was just a little anxious to mark the result.

So he entered the room, and seeing the other two billiard balls on the floor, he quickly put the third one a little further away.

The others followed him timidly.

"What is the trouble?" he asked, looking around at the wreck the explosion had wrought.

"Mercy!" screamed the wives, as they looked in.

"Trouble!" exclaimed Shorty, a trifle pale. "Why, one of the balls exploded."

Shorty and the Kid exchanged bewildered glances.

"Well, if you are not crazy, this must be one of your jokes," said the Kid's wife.

"But they'll find it no joke to pay for the damage they have done," Shorty's wife added.

"A pair of smarties, aren't you?" sneered the Old Man, and with a look of contempt they all followed him from the room, leaving the two paralyzed jokers still looking at each other.

"Soy, what der yer make of it?" asked the Kid, the first to recover from the stupor.

"I don't make anything. But I'd take my dyin' affy that when I punched my ball against ther red that one or the other of them bust."

"But der balls is all there."

"An' so's ther ruin. Something exploded—there's no need of a fortune teller to prove that."

"But what was it?"

"Ask me something easy; I'm tired," said Shorty, falling into a chair.

"Der cloth is ruined," mused the Kid, "but I don't see any signs of a 'splosion."

"But we saw it and heard it, and there is plenty of evidence that there was one. Look at the balls closely—bring 'em here."

Shorty took the three ivory spheres and looked and felt them over carefully without result.

"Well?"

"I was thinking that perhaps the Old Man might have dropped to that card racket and put some nitro glycerine on the balls. But they are just as clean as ever. Well, that takes the boot."

"Sock an' all!"

They puzzled over the matter for some time, and

then, without offering any further explanation to the family, went out to give orders for repairs, and when they returned an hour or two later they found pasted on one of the walls a slip of paper on which was printed—“*Kick me; I’m in a hurry.*”

Then they tumbled, but yet they could not account for the explosion, and concluded not to say anything further about it, leaving the Old Man to have his laugh all to himself if he was really the author of the mystery.

And laugh he did until all the scars and memories of the tricks that had been played on him by Shorty and the Kid were obliterated.

Many questions were asked respecting the mysterious explosion, but none were answered by Shorty or the Kid, for they felt certain that if it was the Old Man he would give it away in time, being unable to keep it all alone.

But that was only a little episode compared with what was on the Old Man’s mind, for the farming career was on hand now, and he was back and forth every day and full of business.

The wives all visited the kids at school, and, besides taking them lots of nice things, informed them that they should have a whole summer long vacation, beginning as soon as they got moved to the country, which, of course, delighted them.

About all that Shorty and the Kid interested themselves in, however, was seeing after their yacht, their mule team, game cocks, and other things pertaining to their own enjoyment, leaving the Old Man to superintend nearly everything else.

But by the first of May they were back in their country home on Long Island again. The kids joined them with a hurrah, and it was only a little while before the whole neighborhood knew they had returned, one year advanced in mischief.

The Burwicks, however, were considered big guns, if they were little people in stature, and were always welcomed on account of the business they made and the money they spent.

The country store that they started was still there and doing a good business, while every church and charitable society for miles around rejoiced at their return as though at the return of “good times.”

The Old Man was excessively busy, taking it upon himself to superintend everything, dressed in farmer’s clothes, while both Shorty and the Kid had had all the farming they wanted, and were perfectly willing that he should have things all his own way, so long as they could do as they liked.

And such fun as those three chips of those three old blocks had, romping over the place and finding all sorts of mischief to do! But each of their mothers tried to interest them in floriculture, giving each one of them a garden bed in which he could plant whatever he liked.

This, of course, became interesting, for each one became ambitious of outdoing the other, and every thing that could be begged, borrowed, bought, or stolen was worked into those rival beds.

And they played tricks on each other, too.

They planted all sorts of unlikely things in each other’s flower-beds on the sly, and when those things began to come up they did not in the least surprise the young agriculturists, but their parents were completely puzzled.

Cal knew that he had put skunk cabbage and thistles in Ed’s bed, and Ed knew that he had planted a lot of thistle roots and twitch grass in Cal’s mound of hope, while Peter was not at all surprised to see potatoes and onions coming up in both of them among other things.

But he was just a little surprised to find such a lot of pussy willow and smart weed growing in his bed. And yet it did not take him long to tumble, and so, after having a good laugh, they set to work to weed their beds, greatly to the delight of the mothers, who were very glad to see them so greatly interested in separating the tares from the wheat, so to speak.

As for Ginger, he was kept very busy. He had to throw aside his dress coat now and jump right in at gardening with a granger garb, save while waiting on the table morning and evening.

And this did not please him overmuch, for he was inclined to be a toady coon, and felt much better in a dress suit than in such clothes.

Besides this, those kids were continually putting some snap or other on him, and he had to keep his eyes continually peeled to avoid them.

But things were going on very nicely, though. The Old Man had his crops nearly all in, while Shorty and the Kid spent the most of their time on their yacht *Shorty*, either fishing or sailing about Long Island Sound, or visiting different places nearby or on the Connecticut shore, being absent frequently days at a time.

They took Ginger along with them sometimes, but it was like out of the frying-pan into the fire, for they were quite as apt to play tricks on him as the kids were. Indeed, his life was not wholly strewn with roses, although there could be no mistake about his having a good home, and, for the most part, an easy time of it.

But of course he would kick when he found a lot of smart weed leaves between the sheets of his bed.

This he did on one occasion. He blew out the light before opening his bed, and tumbled in upon them. They soon got in their work and made his skin smart as though burned. He rubbed, but that only made matters worse, until finally, unable to stand it any longer, he got up and lit the light to investigate.

He discovered the trouble and suspected the authors of it, having heard them speak of the weed, but it was a long time before he could get to sleep.

But occasionally those young mischiefs would get the worst of their rackets themselves. For instance:

A hawk had built her nest in the top of a tall wal-

nut tree not far from their place, and it became the object of their lives to secure the eggs, so as to put them under a setting hen and have them hatched, so as to surprise not only the hen, but their parents as well.

But after contriving many ways to get at the nest, it was found only possible to reach it by climbing the tree and crawling out upon the limb where it was located.

Peter volunteered to try it, and up the tree he went with the agility of a cat, while the other two watched and encouraged him.

But that pair of hawks who had located their home-stead there began to put in objections by way of flying savagely at him, and striking him with their sharp bills and talons.

Cal and Ed, however, threw stones at them with partial success, although more stones hit Pete than hit the birds. But the little fellow was game, and fought his way to the nest, which he finally secured, with three eggs in it, and which he managed to drop without harm into Ed’s hat.

That was certainly a triumph for the little fellow, but his trouble began at the same time; for, while endeavoring to work his way back again to the trunk of the tree, the hawks set upon him more savagely than ever, and he lost his hold and fell nearly half way to the ground before the sharp end of a broken limb inserted itself in the seat of his trousers and held him suspended.

He screamed and so did the birds. He struck at them and they at him, and it was a sensational situation in all respects. Ed ran home with the hawks’ nest and hid it, while Cal threw stones at the hawks.

The mothers came running in great alarm, and Ginger took in the situation and brought a long ladder.

“It sare you jes’ right,” said he, as he reached and rescued him from the limb.

The birds flew away on seeing Ginger, but continued to scream and circle around the tree rapidly.

The trouble was explained by saying that he had fallen while up in the tree “looking” at the hawk’s nest, when he was attacked by the parent birds, never a word being said about having secured the nest.

Of course his mother scolded him and was joined by the others, who threatened all sorts of things if they were ever caught at such business again, and Pete was taken into the house for repairs, while Ed and Cal had a chance to put those stolen hawk eggs under a hen that had begun to set that day.

Two hours before this occurrence the Old Man, dressed up quite smartly, had started with a team of horses and a buckboard wagon to visit the next town, some eight or ten miles away, to buy some new seed or other he had heard of.

Merrily he drove along, as happy a man as there was on Long Island, and he would sing:

“For to plow and to sow,
To reap and to mow,
To be a farmer’s boy—
To be a farmer’s boy.”

The woods each side of the narrow roadway echoed his cherry song and in spite of the sand his team trotted merrily along in rhythmic cadence as though proud of being farmer’s horses.

They were passing through a long stretch of woods when about half way to his destination, and the Old Man was enjoying the delicious shade and the peculiar fragrance of the wood smells which always abound in spring time which the birds seem to tell of in their echoing songs, when three powerful tramps sprang out of the bush by the roadside, one of whom seized the horses.

“Get down!” cried one of the others.

“What?” roared the Old Man.

“Hump and climb down!”

“Who are you?”

“Gentlemen,” they all three said together.

The Old Man at once remembered the same sort of a “gentleman” he met at Hickory Point, and he regretted that he left his revolver at home.

“Gentlemen of the road, I guess.”

“Never mind. Get down, or we shall yank you,” said the leader.

“What do you want?”

“All you have got.”

“Well, I haven’t got it all with me,” said he.

“Never mind, we will take what you happen to have. Will you get down?” he asked, at the same time pulling a big gun.

“Certainly, but—” and he hesitated.

“I hate to bore a hole in you.”

“Well, I hate to have you,” said he, jumping out.

“What do you want—my money?”

“Yes, everything. I want that suit of clothes of yours for my pal, here. Get out of ‘em!”

“But what am I to do—go naked?”

“No. We’re gentlemen—business men—and you shall have his clothes in exchange. He has had them long enough, and you won’t want them very long anyhow. Peel!”

The Old Man took a look at the fellow with whom he was to exchange suits, and his heart went down to his boots. He was quite as large but considerably taller than he was, but the bottoms of his trouser-legs were worn off so that they would not be very much too long for him if forced into them. But they and every garment he had on was filthy and tattered to the last degree.

“Gentlemen—a—this must be a joke,” said he.

“You will find it is not if you don’t peel at once,” said the leader, cocking his pistol.

And he did see that it was no joke. So he reluctantly proceeded to get out of a good suit of clothes while the tramp got out of a bad one.

They allowed him to retain his underclothes, for

they did not appreciate such luxuries, and then the Old Man wished that his pockets had been in them.

It was a tough job, but rather than appear without anything, he shudderingly got into the tramp’s duds, while the tramp arrayed himself in his, even to the hat, handing him the worst looking old caddy he had ever seen in exchange for his own new one.

“There you are. Don’t you see how much better and more business like it is to submit quietly to the inevitable?” asked the leader.

“Oh, go to blazes!” said the Old Man, at the same time making an attempt to regain the wagon.

“Hold on, boss!” and they pulled him back.

“What?”

“We’ll take charge of this team, if you please.”

“But I don’t please!” roared the Old Man.

“Then you’ll have to stand it without pleasing,” and all three of them jumped into the wagon and the leader took up the reins.

“This is monstrous!”

“Good luck, yes. We don’t meet it every day. Good-bye. Go back to the bosom of your family,” saying which they drove off, the man with his suit on covering him with a gun.

The Old Man followed after a while, but saw them turn into a road leading to another town, and then he stood still, the picture of wreck and misfortune.

CHAPTER XXI.

SOME more of the Old Man’s luck!

Robbed of everything he had, and forced into the filthy duds of the worst one of the lot, and left in the road several miles from anywhere!

Was there ever anybody else that had such luck?

I doubt it.

But just then he was too bewildered by the audacity of the robbery to think about its being a piece of his luck, or anything else but a confounded outrage.

The idea of there being highway robbers on Long Island, the garden of New York, was too much for anybody to believe at once.

After gazing until the robbers were out of sight, going toward the south side, he turned and started back toward home, never for a moment thinking how awfully he looked, or that he himself was liable to be taken for a tramp.

“Well, this beats all creation—this caps the climax!” he growled, as he walked along. “Oh, that I could reach the constable, and set him after the vagabonds! I’ll telegraph all over the island, and they shall not escape!”

He wasn’t singing now, but gnashing his upper and unders.

What a contrast with fifteen minutes before!

On he plodded as fast as he could go, with the gaping boots of the tramp half full of sand, until just before he came to where another road turned into the one he was on, he saw a farmer driving along, and evidently going directly his way.

“Hello! neighbor, hello!” he shouted, at the same time waving his hand.

“Neighbor” looked, but kept right on.

“Neighbor, give us a ride?”

“Not if I know myself,” cried the man.

“I’ve been robbed back here.”

“You look it.”

“Drive me to the constable’s, please?”

“Constable’s! That’s too thin. I guess you’d like to go in any other direction but that. Too thin, Mr. Tramp.”

“I’m no tramp,” replied the Old Man.

“No, you look like a high-fed clergyman,” he retorted, with a loud laugh.

“I tell you I am a respectable citizen.”

“Yes, you very much resemble one.”

“I’m in distress.”

“I should say you were.”

“Please give me a ride?”

“I never encourage tramps, except with a dog and shot-gun. G’lang!” he cried to his horses, and in less than a minute the Old Man was taking more of his dust than he cared for.

“Hang me, if that isn’t the meanest man I ever met in my life. But I suppose I do look very much like a tramp, and how in thunder shall I ever reach home?”

This was the great question and sorrow of the occasion, and feeling exhausted he sat down on a rock to think even more about it.

“Yes,” said he, after a few moments’ thought, “come to think of it, it’s all right, I should not be surprised—it’s only my luck. But there’s one consolation about it, Shorty could have had nothing to do with this affair, for he is off in his yacht. Wonder if they all went? I hope so, that I may be enabled to reach home and some decent clothes without being seen, for they have laughs enough on me already.”

And after thinking the matter over for a few moments longer, he got up and again began to plod his homeward weary way.

But everybody he met avoided him.

Dogs growled from behind fences, and others ran out and snapped at his heels. Even a stray calf he met in the road wheeled around, and with tail erect and frightened bleat made a break for the nearest opening for a field.

He met a man whom he knew quite well, and stopping attempted to speak with him.

“No, no. Git on. I’ve got nothing for tramps,” was the choking off reply.

He met another one with a dog soon after. He grabbed the dog by the collar, and the Old Man was just a little encouraged.

“Mr. Jones, I—”

“Get on or I’ll let the dog at you. He is in training for tramps,” replied the man, savagely.

“But I am no tramp, I—”

"Come on, Jack," and he pulled the dog away with some difficulty, for it was evident that he wanted to sample the tramp.

The poor Old Man was utterly crushed at this, but could he have seen himself in a mirror he would not have been surprised that his most intimate friends did not recognize him.

He thought they would at least remember his face if he was so outrageously clothed, but the dust he had encountered on the road, and the perspiration that was oozing from his bald head and chubby face had mingled in such a way that he didn't resemble Josiah Burwick any more than he did a tortoise-shell cat.

And so he concluded to make his way home by some roundabout roads, and not attempt to see the officers of the law until he had gotten into a more respectable-looking harness.

were barking and snapping at the Old Man's unprotected shins.

This uproar attracted the wives, who ran out to see what the trouble was, just as Pete opened the gate and let the Newfoundland out, the Old Man all the while protesting wildly.

"Call off those dogs!" cried his wife.

"Boys, come here!"

"Ginger, hurry out there!" and half a dozen orders were given by the women folks, and all the while those delighted kids were sicking on the dogs with all their might.

Ginger rushed upon the scene just as Bruno had thrown the Old Man and was preparing for an argument with him.

Seizing him by the collar and calling at the same time, he managed to release his hold before he had

The wives also rushed out of the house to make sure about all this.

Shorty and the Kid approached, inquiringly. They all met together around the Old Man.

"It's pop!" shouted little Cal.

"Who?"

"Hey?" Shorty and the Kid.

"Pop."

"Josiah Burwick, is this really you?" asked his wife, approaching nearer to him.

"Yes. I was waylaid and robbed by tramps, who not only stole the team, but robbed me of everything, including my clothes, and I have been obliged to make my way back on foot, and in this disgusting rig," said he.

"What a shame!"

"What an outrage!" and even Shorty and all of the kids agreed in this.



"Bruno, Bruno, don't you know me?" the Old Man asked, holding out his hands to him. A savage growl was his answer, which seemed to make the little dogs more crazy yet. "Poor Bruno!" But Bruno didn't consider himself poor at all, especially at running tramps.

This wise resolution he at once proceeded to carry out as fast as his short fat legs would let him.

But whenever a dog espied him he was sure to let all the other dogs in the neighborhood know that there was something suspicious around, and so there was music in the air all along his dusty line of march.

However, he finally managed to reach home, looking by that time, if possible, even worse than ever, and went toward the front gate.

But there he met unexpected trouble, for the big Newfoundland dog made a savage spring toward it with a yip and a growl, that was anything but hospitable.

This aroused the three terriers belonging to the Kids, and they began to bark and prance around in search of some place where they could get out into the road and have some fun with him.

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"Poor Bruno!"

But Bruno didn't consider himself poor at all, especially at running tramps.

Just then the three Kids came upon the scene, and seeing the supposed tramp, they at once began to sic on the dogs.

"Be quiet!" reared the Old Man. "It's me."

"Sic him, Bruno!" shouted his own son.

"Open the gate and see some fun!" cried the delighted little Peter Pad.

"Yes, yes!" the other two responded quickly, and by this time the other three dogs had found a hole under the fence, out of which they had crawled, and

got a meat grip on him, greatly to the disgust of the kids.

"Git outen in der house dar!" he cried, giving the dog a kick that sent him away in a very unsatisfied frame of mind.

The Old Man regained his feet and began to yell like a trooper, at the same time making a rush into the front yard.

"Don't let him come in here!" cried the ladies.

"Git out!" yelled the kids, each one of whom had picked up a handful of stones with which to pelt the intruder.

The Old Man sat down on a garden chair and puffed like a bull.

"You can't stay heah, sah," said Ginger.

"The — I can't! Well, I'd like to know why?" demanded the Old Man, pulling off that tramp's hat and throwing it aside, when all three of the little dogs attempted to disjoint it.

"We don't entertain tramps."

"Fire him out!" shouted little Cal.

"Who are you?" demanded one of the wives.

"Your husband."

"What?"

This everybody exclaimed, and the kids sent up a shout of derision just as Shorty and the Kid came sauntering up from the dock like two ducks who had been for a swim.

"Your unfortunate husband, yes. And as for you, young man," he added, addressing his son. "I will make life a wilderness of woe for you to pay for this."

The kids were silent, for they began to realize that it was the Old Man after all.

"And they got away with the team?"

"Yes, at the point of the pistol."

"Why didn't yer go fixed, pop?" asked the Kid.

"Fixed! Who ever thought of encountering highwaymen on Long Island?" he asked.

"That's so. They were tramps."

"I should say so, if that is a sample of the clothes they wore. Come, go up-stairs and get a change, and have these burned. Heavens!" and it was a mixture of smiles and looks of indignation when the Old Man rose to his feet.

"And to think that I should be mistaken for a tramp at my own door, and my own son set my own dog upon me," said he, turning upon youthful California.

"But who could help it? I thought you were the worst looking tramp I ever saw; so did we all, and it is no wonder that the children did not know you," said his wife.

"Well, but the young rascal was altogether too fresh. Even if it had been a tramp, he had no business to set the dogs on him. I shall not forget that, young man."

Cal had nothing to say.

"Tell me more about this, dad, and I'll set the officers to work. Ginger, harness first and second mule to the dog cart, tandem," said Shorty, and then he accompanied his father up-stairs and helped him out of the tramp suit into a respectable one once more.

And while doing this he gave him a full description of the affair and of the highwaymen, after which Shorty and the Kid mounted the dog cart and drove briskly away.

Everybody connected with the household looked

upon it as a great outrage, as it really was, even the kids taking that view of it.

But little Cal looked serious, and finally succeeded in coaxing the other two off somewhere, so as to be out of sight, when the Old Man appeared again, for he had a dim idea that there would be a severe tingling sensation in the most bulbous portion of his body, growing out of this.

As for Ginger, when left to himself, he went into the barn and laughed for ten minutes, after which he took a quarter out of his change-pocket and transferred it to his savings bank pocket.

"I war gwine to de next circus dat comes along wid dat quarter. But dis yer am better dan a circus—all fo' nuffin—so I put it away wid my sabin and stay home satisfied," said he.

And the kids said among themselves that it was fun while it lasted, that it was too bad it was the Old Man, but wouldn't they have some fun with the next tramp that came along, when they knew it wasn't one of the family.

Then they went fishing for flounders.

Well, after a bath and a thorough change throughout the Old Man felt better, and in the meantime Ginger had made a stinking bonfire of the tramp's vile duds, which was the only way of certain purification.

And so far as the highwaymen were concerned, he felt at ease. He knew Shorty's pluck, and that he had the whole thing in charge.

After a hearty lunch he went out on the lawn to enjoy a cigar and a little quiet meditation.

The big Newfoundland dog went sneaking up to where he sat, as though convinced that he had made a mistake and anxious to apologize, but when he got within reach the Old Man shot out his foot at him, and he retired.

"Confounded you, you would have had hold of my windpipe if you hadn't been pulled off!" said he, savagely.

The other dogs were off with the kids.

Bruno seemed to feel that he was not loved just as a mistaken dog should be, whose intentions were the best in the world. So he sat down on his haunches and took a good look at him, as if he would make sure of him the next time under any disguise.

"Well, old fellow, I don't suppose it was your fault; you didn't know me any more than the others did, so come here and let us be good friends again," said he, and the intelligent creature bounded to his side to be caressed and made much of.

"Nice old fellow. Didn't know me, did you? Oh, well, that's all right; it won't happen again."

Bruno wagged his long bushy tail just as though he thought so too.

"Dat war a great outrage, Mr. Burwick," said Ginger, approaching where he sat.

"Well, I should say so. But I'll have the rascals if they are on the island, and they haven't had time to get off of it yet," replied the Old Man.

"Shorty hab gone fo' 'em."

"Yes."

And he was right; Shorty had gone for them.

He was full of fun and mischief and all that sort of thing, but he was a bad one to play crooked business on.

The first thing he did was to notify the village constable, after which he telegraphed the sheriff of the county and to all points leading to New York, giving a full description of the highwaymen and the stolen property, and ordering their arrest, backed by a good reward.

This accomplished, he left it in the hands of the authorities and returned home.

The result was that the rascals were caught before night while trying to sell the team, the scamp that had the Old Man's clothes on trying to do the business under the guise of a farmer without further use for the team.

The property was restored, conviction speedily followed, and at this writing they will each of them be eighteen years older when they get out of State's prison, and by which time also the Old Man will probably have no use for a team.

All's well that ends well, and so far as the Old Man and society in general was concerned, this thing ended well, although the tramps kicked as a matter of course. They are never willing to do anything for the good of society.

But everything quickly resumed its old smile on the farm with heaps of happiness for every member of the household.

Flowers were blooming everywhere, from the humble daisy of the field to the stately queen of all flowers in the garden, and other blooms bowed in homage.

Riding on land and sailing on the lovely Sound were continually indulged in by some of the household, and not unfrequently Shorty's banjo would fling out its melody from somewhere, and accompanying it could be heard the lively clatter of six little feet as the kids chipped in for a jig or a breakdown, under the direction of the elder Kid.

Strange as it may appear, nothing of any consequence happened to the Old Man for a long time, and he was growing even more sleek and rotund than ever.

But, of course, such a paradisical state of affairs could not last long under the circumstances.

Fourth of July was approaching, and already some preparation had been made for celebrating it, although it was hard work to convince the kids that it would be better, in fact, the proper thing to do, to keep everything until the morning of the glorious day arrived, when they could sail in.

This was a hard pill to swallow, especially as different sized fire crackers were for sale at the village store, and Peter bought a single "cannon," resolving to have a taste of the "Great and Glorious" before it

arrived, if he had to go a mile away into the woods to do it.

He kept the secret of its possession to himself and the red explosive hidden. Every now and then he would go and take a look at it, caress it fondly and calculate about how much noise it would make.

Finally he could keep the secret no longer, and told Cal and Ed about his big cracker.

Then they began to think how they could fire it to the greatest advantage, and various ideas and propositions were discussed, but without hitting upon anything in which two of them agreed.

The next day there was unusual quiet in and around the homestead. Shorty and the Kid had taken the wives and a party of friends from New York out for a sail. Ginger had been sent to the city for something, the kids were somewhere, probably fishing as they most always were, and there was nobody at home but the Old Man and the servants about the house.

At noon he ate a hearty lunch all alone, after which he lit a cigar and sauntered out upon the lawn to enjoy it in the cool shade.

The air was full of fragrance and the songs of birds, and a gentle breeze toyed with flower and shrub or sang in the treetops overhead.

The scene and its surroundings could but tempt one to repose, and the Old Man at peace with himself and all the world sat down on a rustic lawn chair, finished his cigar in a reverie, and then proceeded to fall asleep with his hat resting on his nose as sweetly as a child.

The oblivion of sleep rested upon him, and the bumble-bees played their bassoons in his ears, and the gentle house-fly crawled all over his exposed parts without ever disturbing him.

Half an hour passed, when the three kids came up the road with a basket of fish.

They espied the Old Man.

An idea of some sort seemed to strike them at once, and there was much whispering and pantomime.

Finally Pete ran for his cannon-cracker, and the other two got behind a hedge from whence they could retreat unobserved.

They were wise enough to take their basket of fish along, for it might assist them effectually in case anything was laid to them.

Pete returned with his big cracker and match.

Stealing softly up behind the chair where the Old Man was gently snoring, he placed it carefully in position beneath it.

Then, looking around to see that the coast was clear, he lit the fuse and darted behind the hedge to join his companions.

There were peep-holes in the hedge through which they could look, but they had not long to wait.

That monster cracker exploded with the report of a field-piece.

Whether it was the concession or the fright, or both, may not be known, but at all events the Old Man bounded about two feet into the air, and landing on the chair again crushed it to a wreck, in which he struggled and shouted for help.

The kids had not expected this, and were so frightened that they ran for some time without stopping. In fact, they did not fully stop to talk of the matter until they got back to their boat.

CHAPTER XXII.

AFTER flopping around there on the grass with the ruins of that garden-chair, the Old Man finally regained his feet and looked savagely around.

Not a soul was there in sight.

The dog Bruno stood looking at him, having been attracted by the report and shouting, but it was very evident that he had not done the mischief.

Who in thunder was it, then, who had fired that gun? for such he thought it to be at first.

"Say, hello!" he called.

But there wasn't even an echo to answer him.

He started to walk about the place for the purpose of investigating the mystery, and Bruno bounded along by his side, evidently thinking there was going to be some more fun of some sort.

There was nobody to be found around the place but the old colored cook, Dinah, and she was so deaf that it needed a fog-horn to talk with her.

"Where is everybody?" he yelled.

"Gone fishin', I s'pect."

"Who fired that gun?" he roared again.

"Who's out in de sun?"

"Oh, go to blazes!" he exclaimed, and he again walked out upon the lawn and looked at the wreck he had made of that garden-chair.

"Well, that hives the biscuit!" he mused, as he stood looking at it. "Is it possible that I was dreaming and imagined I heard that report which caused me to bound into the atmosphere and back again to produce this wreck? I have heard of such things, and yet I can't remember that I was dreaming at all. Queer, anyway."

At that instant his attention was drawn to the three kids, who again approached the house with their basket of fish.

They never looked brighter, handsomer, or more innocent in their lives.

The little rascals had had time to indulge in their laugh and to get sobered down so as not to look guilty or suspicious.

"Hello, papa," said his kid Cal. "See what a nice mess of fish we have got," and he held the basket for him to look at them.

"Oh, we had bully fun," said Pete.

"You bet," added Ed.

"And we're going to have them cooked for our dinner," said Cal.

"All right," replied the Old Man, waving them

away, for he did not feel in the humor to talk to them just then.

"Look at the chair!" cried Pete, pointing to the wreck.

"Who broke it?" asked Cal.

"Oh, it was getting old and rotten, and it broke down while I was sitting in it. Go and have the cook fry your fish."

"Yes, papa," and the three little scamps scampered off toward the kitchen.

But the Old Man didn't see them pounding each other, ready to burst with laughter as they went along, or he might have suspected that they knew all about who fired "that gun."

He walked to another portion of the lawn, and on another chair sat him down and tried to think himself out of the business; whether he had been dreaming or what had happened, while the little fishermen went for the cook.

"Here, cook 'em for our dinner," said Cal, placing the basket of fish before her.

"Now—now, chile, I's got all I can do without mussin' wid you small fry," said Dinah.

"Ok, but pop said you must."

"Don't care nuffin' bout you pop."

"Well, yer'd better or yer'll get the bounce," said Pete, resolutely.

"Who gib me de bounce?"

"Pop will."

"And my pop."

"And my pop."

"Shoo!"

"And you won't get that dress we was going to buy for you," said Cal.

"Wha' dat you say?" she asked.

"That dress we were going to give you. That's all right, old gal, we don't want any fish."

"Shoo! Whar you get money fo' buy a dress?"

"We got plenty of money, and our pops'll give us plenty more. But it's all right, Dinah, we don't care about having our fish fried," and all three of them started to walk away.

"Give 'em to the cat," said Ed.

"Hole on dar, honeys, I war only foolin'; I cooks de fish fo' you," said she, weakening.

"All right. Go ahead and call us when they are all ready," said Pete, and away they went in search of more fun and adventure meantime.

They didn't bother the farm-hands much, for one of them had given Cal a good switching not long before on account of some of his capers, and gave all three of them warning that they would get the same dose if they caine monkeying around him any more.

But there was a plenty of other territory for them to ramble over, and they were never slow to improve every opportunity.

The terriers joined them on this occasion, and while laughing and wandering aimlessly about they came upon the inclosure where the Old Man kept his Jersey sheep, and they climbed the fence to look at them.

There was a sturdy looking ram and eight matronly looking sheep, the envy of all the farmers in the neighborhood.

"I'll bet you daresent ride that old ram," said Pete to Cal.

"I'll bet you daresent."

"Bet I dare."

"Bet you my fish against yours."

"I'll bet mine too," said Ed.

"I'll do it," said Pete, and he leaped down from the fence into the inclosure.

Now, so far as the sheep were concerned, they were remarkably gentle creatures, and even the old ram would not molest any one unless he was annoyed at something.

So Pete walked bravely among them, and they scarcely moved or noticed his approach.

But he was watching his chances, and, finally seeing one, he leaped astride of the old ram.

Then that gentleman sheep began to run in order to shake off this unaccustomed load, for he had never been "broken" to bareback riding, and the way he did scoot was a caution, and the dogs, who from the first had taken a lively interest in the proceedings, had all they could do to keep within barking distance.

But Pete dove his fingers into the ram's wool and managed to keep his seat for a time, while Cal and Ed began to feel hungry for their fish, but cheered him all the same.

Two or three times around the inclosure went that ram, while the sheep looked on in astonishment, not being able to tell to save their mutton what the dickens it was all about.

But if the dogs had kept away it might not have been so bad, but they were barking and snapping at the ram's legs until he became frantic, and in charging upon them pitched Master Peter off over his head and was free again.

Up to this time the fun had all been on one side, but now it speedily changed.

The Old Man, attracted by the shouting of the kids and the barking of the dogs, suspecting there was mischief afoot, arrived upon the scene just in time to witness the catastrophe.

The dogs skipped out, and the Old Man yelled for a cessation of the sport.

But that indignant ram had his war-paint on now, and evidently hankered for gore.

Peter got up, but was promptly butted prone upon the grass again, while Mr. Ram stood all ready for another charge as soon as yelling Peter should attempt the perpendicular again.

"What in thunder are you boys doing here?" roared the Old Man.

"Peter was riding the sheep, papa," said Cal.

"The young rascal! I hope the ram will kill him!" said he, in his anger.

Peter was calling for help, not daring to get up,

and, calling the dogs, Ed and Cal ran to his rescue, sicking the dogs on to the ram.

Then there was more fun, and little Cal was sent to grass by a resounding butt.

This enabled Peter to regain his feet, but he had scarcely done so when the ram turned and knocked him against Ed, and over they went on top of one of the terriers, who was trying to hide behind him.

The ram was making it very lively for those kids and, unable to stand it any longer, the Old Man got over the fence for the purpose of putting an end to the business.

"Shoo, there—shoo!" he cried, and the ram at once faced him, full of fight.

"Get out of here, you young scampgraces," he cried, turning to the kids.

And they did not stop upon the order of their going, but ran like foxes for the fence.

And he and Ed started to go.

"Where is Peter?"

"I don't know, papa. The last I saw of him he was going through the corn without walking."

The Old Man remembered how the daring bare-back rider had been assisted through the fence by the ram, and he could but smile as he struggled to his feet at the quaint way Cal put it.

"Well, if I get hold of him I will serve him worse than the ram did. But I guess neither of you will go in there again," he added, as he limped away in the direction of the barn.

As for all three of the boys, they had forgotten all about their fish that Dinah was cooking for them. Indeed, they forgot all about being hungry.

Pete was hiding in the corn, but when he saw the Old Man disappear into the barn he came cautiously forth and joined the other kids.

that had happened him during the day, when his lameness didn't bother him, and the next morning he awoke with the lark, and felt at peace with all the world.

The visitors returned to the city the following morning, and again the Shorty home fell into its old accustomed rut.

It was two or three days after these lively occurrences that Shorty and the Kid overheard the Old Man giving Pat, the farmer, some orders relative to preparing a patch of ground for turnips, and telling him particularly how to do it, just as though he knew more about it than he did.

So, as usual, they set to work to guy him.

"Soy, what a nerve you've got, dad," said Shorty, looking him over.

"What do you mean, sir?" demanded the Old Man, indignantly, for he was feeling very much like a boss.



On flew that runaway mule, this way and that, making all sorts of furrows in all sorts of places; but finally a happy thought overtook the Old Man and he pointed the plow down deep into the soil to check that mad career.

But there was red paint in that ram's eye, and he had it on his tormentor. He broke away and started after him, followed by the Old Man.

"Cheese it!" shouted Cal, and they all put on more steam and legged it.

But that ram was there nearly on time, for just as Pete was in the act of crawling between the rails of the fence he struck him, and he shot through like an arrow into some corn, while the other two escaped unnoticed.

The Old Man was just behind, shouting, and instantly the ram turned on him.

"Get out, you beast! shoo!" and he struck at him with his hat.

But the goat didn't mind that a cent's worth, and began to dance around him as though trying to get an opening for business.

Cal and Ed came to the rescue by throwing stones at the ram, and this temporarily distracted his attention from the Old Man.

"Now, papa, cheese it!" cried Cal, and his worthy dad attempted to scale the fence.

He got over, but the ram did more than half the work by jumping head first into the big full moon he saw presented.

The battle was over, and the boss of that sheep pasture was the victor.

The wounded were all on the other side of the fence.

The Old Man landed on his head and rolled over like a big pumpkin.

"Did he hurt you, papa?" asked his son.

"Oh, shut up and clear out or I will hurt you, confound you," he roared.

"Yes, papa."

"Say, sellers, didn't I win them fish?" he asked, and at the same time his face showed he was in pain.

"Yes, you did," said they.

"Well, you may have 'em, I don't feel like eating," he replied, limping up-stairs to his room, where he ruminated the remainder of the day on the perilous uncertainty of riding rams.

The Old Man wasn't feeling very well himself.

That was the second shaking up he had received that afternoon at the hands of those boys, and he was in anything but a Christian mood.

But there was just a pinch of consolation in the thought that those little rascals had received a taste of it as well, and would probably never venture to repeat the racket.

"Oh, confound that ram!" he growled, as he rubbed the seat of his trousers. "He is what I call a regular battering ram. But it is only another piece of my usual luck, confound it! I do believe if I were shut up in an iron cage that my luck would follow me there."

And so he growled and berated himself until he finally fell asleep on some hay, where he slept until the return of the folks from the yachting excursion, when he got slowly up, went slowly and lamely to his chamber to dress for dinner.

It was a jolly party that had come up to visit the Shortys, and who had been out yachting, but it did not fully blossom into the possibilities it contained until after dinner.

Then there was music and dancing, and all sorts of pleasurable things indulged in, until long after the neighbors had gone to roost.

And under its magic sway the Old Man forgot all

farmer that day, and had evidently forgotten his many mishaps and mistakes in days gone by.

"Soy, it's no wonder he never gets killed," said the Kid.

"What are you fellows driving at? You had better go to work yourselves instead of loafing around and criticizing other people," said he.

"Never saw such a nerve in my life," said Shorty.

"Nerve soaked in gall!" added the Kid.

"What do you mean?" he again demanded, for he never would tumble to their getting him on a string, even after all that had happened.

"Why, the idea of your giving Pat orders about planting turnips—he an old farmer, and you only an amateur duffer at their business!"

"Who says I am a duffer?" he roared.

"Why, old man Peter Pad says so."

"Cert. Laughs at yer," added the Kid.

"I don't believe he ever said so."

"Fact. He says you can't plow or harrow, or do anything but boss around. He never saw yer do any real farmer work."

"Oh, he be hanged! I'm just as good a farmer as he is!" replied the Old Man, indignantly.

"All right. There's where the gall comes in," said Shorty, at which both he and the Kid laughed.

"Soy, if cheek was sellin' for a cent a pound pop would be as good as a gold mine."

"Buh!" and with a grunt and growl he turned indignantly away and left them.

Of course they laughed, but kept their eyes on him to see what he would do.

In truth, the chaff they had given him had riled him considerably, for of all things he wanted to be known

as a practical working farmer, the more he thought of it the more he resolved to show those two kids that he was not the slouch they took him for.

He went down to the patch where Pat was plowing, and Shorty and the Kid followed and perched upon the fence to observe him.

The Old Man saw the jokers perched up there on a rail, smoking and looking comical enough to make a funeral procession laugh.

It nekked him and put him on his metal, so to speak.

Shorty and the Kid puffed away, but said nothing that the Old Man could overhear.

But he knew they were there to watch him and to see if he did anything practical, and took no notice of them apparently.

"Pat, unhitch the horse, take him to the barn, and bring down my mule instead," said he, as his man came around to where he was standing.

"Ter put it in ther place av ther hoss, sor?"

"Yes."

"Sure, sor, ther baste hasn't been worked for a week or more, an' he might be flighty."

"Never mind, I'll attend to that. This horse is altogether too slow."

"All right, sor," replied Pat, and he at once proceeded to obey orders.

"That's right, dad, work ther mule," called Shorty, but the Old Man took no notice of him.

"Soy, goin' ter show us some of yer style?" called the Kid, but yet he wouldn't heed them.

He was dressed to look like a farmer if he was none, but he was not content with seeming. No half-way honors for him.

Well, Pat soon returned, leading the mule with the plowing-harness on and proceeded to hitch him to the plow.

"Now, then, I will finish plowing this piece of ground. You go and get out the harrow and have the turnip seed ready to sow. I am going to sow them thick, for the ground will bear it, and there is nothing better to feed stock on in the winter than turnips," said he.

"Roight yees are, sor. We missed them very much ther last winter, so we did," said Pat, and he started back to the barn.

The mule seemed as docile as a lamb, and the Old Man went around him to make sure that all was right, well knowing that Shorty and the Kid were watching him.

Then he took the long reins, placed them around his body under his arms, old farmer-like, and then tied them at the right length, so that he could guide the mule by a simple twist of the body, while he held the plow with both hands.

Shorty and the Kid swapped winks and pulled away at their cigars in silence.

"Get up, Tom," said the Old Man, and the mule started off as honest as a deacon.

He was no stranger to the business of pulling a plow through the soil, but whether he liked it or not was a different thing.

But be that as it may, he went around that "patch" three or four times in proper form, obeying the Old Man's guidance beautifully.

Indeed, he was quite a fine specimen of a Long Island farmer, and he knew that his success was breaking Shorty and the Kid all up. In truth, they were a bit surprised to see how well the Old Man was doing, and concluded they would have to pick him up on something else if they wanted to get any fun out of him.

"Oh, no working farmer, am I? Can't do anything but stand around and boss, eh? Well, I wonder what they think of this?" he muttered, as he saw Shorty and the Kid watching him.

But that mule was somehow increasing his speed gradually, until by this time he was giving the short-legged Old Man all he could do to keep up with him and turn a furrow.

The boys noticed this, and concluded that the pace would wind the Old Man in a short time.

When he was back to them, the Kid jumped down from the fence and picked up a good-sized pebble, and then resumed his seat on the rail.

Around came the Old Man again, and just as he was turning, with his back to them, puffing like a gram-pus and bracing back on the lines to slow the motion of the mule, the Kid threw that pebble and hit the mule on his north ear.

Now that mule was already worked up to the point of letting himself go, and this furnished all the excuse he wanted.

He leaped forward like a long-eared antelope, but the Old Man clung to the plow-handles, held back with all his might and shouted "whoa!"

But that mule wasn't whooping just then, and, on the contrary, let himself out at full length, going over the ground this way and that, while the Old Man with his stubby legs fairly flew after him in spite of himself.

Of course he couldn't get the reins from under his arms, and was obliged to go whether or no, at least ten feet at a leap, all the while yelling with the little wind he had for the mule to stop.

Shorty tumbled over backwards off the fence, and the Kid roared with laughter.

On flew that runaway mule, this way and that, making all sorts of furrows in all sorts of places; but finally a happy thought overtook the Old Man and he pointed the plow down deep into the soil to check that mad career.

The result was a very sudden stop, which threw the plowman away over the plow and landed him on the mule's back.

Shorty and the Kid ran to the rescue.

CHAPTER XXIII.

JOSIAH BURWICK had enjoyed a great many ups and downs in his life, but this being thrown by his own inertia over the plow and landing on the mule's back was about the worst shaking up he had ever received in his life.

And the mule was evidently astonished at this unexpected fall of flesh upon him, for when the Old Man rolled off and fell on the ground the beast turned around to see what it was, and then turned around again to get a better look.

In doing this he twisted himself up in the traces so that his legs got mixed up and he fell down all in a heap and unable to get up or to tell which was the mule or which the plow.

The Old Man lay there as though he were dead, and both Shorty and the Kid made haste to him, while Pat came running across the field, having seen the Old Man's lofty flight.

"Is he hurted?" he asked, anxiously.

"Yes, I guess he is. Call the men and let us take him to the house. Kid, get yer mule and skip for Doc. Bates," said Shorty.

Pat gave a well understood call to the men who were at work lower down in the potatoes, and three of them came running to his assistance, while the Kid skipped for the doctor.

Meanwhile the Old Man was breathing heavily, but showed no other evidence of life.

They procured a big horse blanket, into which they placed him, and then lifting him up tenderly, started toward the house.

Meantime those who had seen the Kid hurriedly saddle his little mule and gallop away thought it strange and wondered what could have happened.

But when they saw the farm hands coming toward the house with their burden, and Shcrty following close behind, they all at once became panicky and guessed that some terrible thing had happened to the Old Man.

His wife ran out to meet them, followed by the other wives, the kids and the servants, and wild agitation reigned supreme for the moment.

"What has happened, George?" they all asked.

"Oh, nothing serious, I guess. You see, dad was plowing with his mule, with the lines around his body, and ther mule run away an' tumbled him all over the ground."

"Mercy! send for the doctor!" cried his wife.

"Charley has gone for him. Take him into the sitting-room and place him on the big lounge there," he added to the men.

This was carefully done, and while Shorty's wife fanned him, his own wife washed the plowed ground from his face and tried tenderly to talk him back to consciousness again.

"Oh, I always knew this farm would be the death of him," said his wife, "and ever since his mishaps of last year he promised me never to bother with it again. Josiah, speak to me!"

Josiah wasn't speaking, but he was breathing very hard.

Shorty ran to make him a cocktail, for he knew from experience that this fragrant concoction would bring him to if anything would.

Everything was done for him that loving, tender hands could do while waiting impatiently for the arrival of the doctor.

Shorty appeared with the cocktail he had mixed, and held it to his nose so that he might inhale its fragrance. It seemed to rouse him.

"Whoa!" he cried, earnestly.

"Take it, dad, take it," whispered Shorty.

The Old Man didn't open his eyes, but he opened his lips and Shorty assisted him in swallowing the gratefulful mixture.

"Whoa!" he cried again.

"Oh, he is out of his head," said his wife. "He must be hurt worse than we know for."

"Whoa!"

"Only to think of it," said the Kid's wife.

"What ails his nibs?" whispered little Ed to Pete, as they stood almost breathlessly around.

"Oh, he tried to stand on his head, but he was too top-heavy," said Pete, aside.

Just then the doctor arrived hurriedly and was shown into the room.

"Whoa!" shouted the Old Man.

"Oh, Dr. Bates, he is out of his head and must be badly injured, perhaps internally," said his anxious wife.

"Let us see," said the doctor, taking a chair and sitting down in front of him, having heard from the Kid the particulars of the mishap.

"Whoa!" came again from the patient as the doctor grasped his wrist to feel his pulse.

He went over the Old Man carefully to see if any bones were broken, but there were none, and he concluded that he had sustained no particular injury beyond a bad shaking up, and this accounted for his stunned condition.

"Do you really think there is nothing broken?" asked his wife, anxiously.

"I think not. Have you some Florida water or cologne?"

All three of the wives rushed for something of the kind while Shorty prepared another cocktail.

They bathed his face and head in half a dozen kinds of perfume, and Shorty again assisted him, with the consent of the doctor, in getting on the outside of another cocktail.

"Whoa!" he cried, as he took the last swallow, and almost immediately opened his eyes.

"Ah, Mr. Burwick, how do you feel?" asked the doctor, while anxious ones gathered around.

"Oh, that's all right. Did you stop him?" he asked, looking wildly around.

"Yes, everything is all right."

"Where am I?"

"Here, with your friends," replied his wife.

"Where's the mule—where's the plow?"

"Down in the lot. Pat and the men are trying to disentangle them," said Shorty, laughing.

"Did he stop?"

"Oh, yes, the same time you did."

"Do you feel bad, Josiah?"

"Oh, Lord, yes."

"Where?"

"All over, inside and out."

"I knew it, doctor; he is hurt internally."

"I think not. He is simply shaken up and may be lame for a few days, but other than that he is all right," said the doctor.

"Soy, dad, how did that medicine strike you?" asked Shorty, with a grin.

"Ah! Any more left?" he asked, closing his eyes in rapture.

"Yes, only the doc says you must only have a dose every half hour."

"What time is it now?"

"Give him another one; it will do him no harm," said the man of pills, and Shorty retired to the side-board in the dining-room, where he concocted another dose of the Old Man's favorite medicine, he being an expert in that sort of thing.

The Old Man revived on this one and sat up, although he still looked a little wild.

"Oh, you are all right, but you had better lay down and rest awhile. I will call around some time tomorrow to see how you are."

"All right, doc," and he laid down again.

Shorty and the Kid could hardly wait until the doctor had gone, so badly did they want to yell.

They went down to the lot where the accident happened, laughing as they went.

Pat had only just succeeded in getting the mule out of the tangle, and he stood there looking as though something had happened him.

Pat knew at once what they were laughing at, and joined with them.

Indeed, he laughed until he could scarcely stand, and then he led that chastened mule back to the barn, and again hitched the horse to the plow and went on with his business, just as he was doing before the Old Man took it into his bald head to show that he was a practical farmer.

At dinner time the Old Man was still asleep and playing his bugle for all it was worth, showing that that portion of his anatomy had not been injured at all events.

And it was concluded not to disturb him, as sleep and rest would be much better for him than a dinner would be.

"George, I believe that you are responsible for that mishap," said the Old Man's wife, as they were now seated at their evening meal.

"No, honest Indian, Angie. He got it into his head that Pat was not plowing fast enough with the old horse, so he ordered up the mule and took the plow himself, just to show him how much better he could do, and what a big, home-made farmer he was," said Shorty.

"Ah, but you are so fond of playing tricks on him," said she.

"No trick this time. Now I lay me!" said he, holding up his hand and looking solemn.

"Well, I do wish he would stop attempting to do things he don't understand. He will surely break his neck some day," said she.

"No, he won't. It's too short."

"Well, I guess he won't attempt to plow again with that unruly mule."

They all believed he would not, but Shorty soon had the table in a roar by relating the particulars of how the Old Man flew over the ground behind that runaway mule, unable to get away until the final catastrophe came.

On the whole it had been a pretty cold day for Josiah Burwick, but, as usual, he bobbed up serenely the next morning, showing scarcely a mark or any evidence of what he had gone through with the day before.

He knew the laugh was on him, but still he regarded it as only an accident; some more of his luck, perhaps, but still an accident which might have happened anybody.

But he was satisfied that he had convinced Shorty and the Kid that he was a practical plowman, and that was all the glory he wanted. Let them laugh at the accident if they wanted to.

But the jokers had carried their point, they had had their laugh out, and so at the breakfast table no allusion was made to it, and other subjects of conversation were indulged in.

It was a trait of the Old Man that he rapidly recovered from anything that happened to him, and so in this case it was only a day or two before he was wholly himself again and everything seemed to have been forgotten.

One noontime, not long afterward, they were all three of them out on the lawn enjoying a smoke after lunch and taking life easy, when a lean, lank traveling missionary came along and stopped at the fence near where they were.

Carlo, who, as usual, made one of the party, at once rose up and gave a warning growl.

"Be quiet!" said the Old Man, and then he glanced at the visitor.

"Ah, my friends, you seem to be enjoying the blessings of this life," said the missionary.

"Got ter do it. Arn't got time for anything else," said Shorty, who lay in the hammock.

"Yes, you seem inclined that way, and to be surrounded with all that wealth can bring. But have you thought of laying up treasures where moth and

rust doth not corrupt, or thieves break through and steal?" he asked, solemnly.

"Oh, we're in a good bank, old man; dry and no rust; moths got no show, and thieves give it the go by," replied Shorty.

"You do not understand me."

"Perhaps yer in ther insurance business. No show. Everything fixed."

"But have you thought of your latter end?"

"Dad did the other day when he was trying to get over a fence."

"I see you are inclined to treat me with levity."

"Give you anything you want. What's your tipple?"

"Cold water, sir."

"All right. There's a first-class well down there, and you can help yourself."

"I prefer the waters of life."

"Didn't I offer to treat him to anything he might name? Bah! If the old fools who send these other fools out on such errands would use their money to directly benefit the poor, they would accomplish some good in the world. They make me tired."

How long this philosophic conversation might have been kept up may not be known, for Shorty was a hater of hypocrisy and cant, but just then little Ed came upon the scene crying and with his nose swollen as big as a tomato.

"What's der matter?" asked the Kid.

"Where the blazes did you get that bugle?" asked Shorty, laughing.

"A—a yaller-tailed wasp bit me—booho!" replied Ed.

"Well, I should say so."

"Well, soy, what business had yer monkeyin' around with yaller-tailed wasps?" demanded the Kid.

and the big bunch over Pete's eye made him look awfully comical.

They wanted to go out and show themselves to their dads, but the mothers put them to bed, with instructions to stay there until called.

They were all right in a day or two, and were frisking about as lively as ever. But you may bet they give that hornets' neighborhood plenty of room after that.

Well, for a week or more nothing of importance happened, which was, indeed, a rare thing for that family.

But in the meantime the striped bass began a very early frolic in Long Island Sound, and Shorty and the Kid went for a mess of them nearly every day. The sport was grand, indeed, for they are the gamiest fish that swims the salt water, in the true sportsman's sense.



He was nearly a mile from the shore and utterly helpless, but seeing the old fish horn, he seized it and blew a blast for assistance until his eyes stuck out like a frog's.

"Haven't got a well of that kind on ther place. No mineral water of any kind on Long Island."

"I see you are bound not to understand me."

"Well, how can I? Talk it right out."

"Permit me to leave you some wholesome reading which may change the current of your thoughts," said the man, producing a lot of tracts.

"All right, anything to accommodate you."

"And I hope the seed I sow will bear good fruit."

"Oh, if yer a seed sharp, talk ter dad. He has charge of all that sort of business."

"Here are some tracts. Please read, ponder, and digest," said he, handing a lot to the Kid.

"Oh, we don't want to die inst yet. Eh? Chestnut?"

"I don't understand you. I am an humble worker in the vineyard."

"Oh, you are, eh? So's dad."

"Soy, how much yer get a day?" asked the Kid.

"Very little, but—"

"Well, why don't yer kick? Join the union and strike for higher wages."

"I cannot talk with you," said the missionary, starting to go.

"Sorry yer tired."

"Soy, give us some more. We shaves ourselves down here," said the Kid.

But that missionary hove a sigh and began to make tracks down the road, fully believing that he had encountered a nest of heathens right on Long Island.

"You are too bad," suggested the Old Man.

"Why? What was his game, anyway?"

"A tract distributor, and you might have treated him civilly at least."

"I—I wasn't doin' nuffin', an' he jumped on me when I wasn't lookin'—booho!"

"Go in and tell your mother to put a flax-seed poultice on it right away," said the Old Man. "Stop. Where is Cal and Pete—did they get stung?"

"Yes. Cal got it on the ear and Pete over the eye," said he, trying hard not to bellow from the pain.

"Where are they?"

"Here they come."

The other two explorers came up just then, and they were a pair of beauties. Cal's ear resembled a big red toad stool, being swollen to four times its natural size, while Pete's eye was not only closed, but the flesh bulged out over it, looking red and angry.

"Well, you are three fine-looking chickens, aren't you?" said Shorty. "Where did they catch you?"

"Up in the woods here. We warn't doing anything to them; we was just walking along."

"Well, I guess you can along after they got in their fine work on you, and I guess you'll keep away from there hereafter. Go in and show yourselves to your mothers and tell them to poultice you with flax-seed," said Shorty, and then all three of them set up a bellowing and started for the house.

Of course they created a sensation, but in a few minutes their loving mothers had fixed them up with a soothing poultice, which at once began to ease the pain.

It wasn't a very artistic job, though, however soothing it might have been. Ed's nose, with its wrappings, looked like a big turnip, while Cal appeared to have about a pound of the poultice on it

"Oh, I'll have to get out my rod and show you how to take striped bass," said the Old Man one evening at the supper-table.

"Yes, show us how same's you showed Pat how to plow," said Shorty.

"Oh, nonsense! That was only an accident that might have happened to anybody," he replied.

"But it could never happen to any man in the world as it happened to you. Forgot when we went out fishing?"

"Now that was all on account of the rackets you two fellows put up on me. In this instance I propose to go alone."

"Now I think you had better not go, Josiah," said his wife, anxiously.

"And why not?"

"Something will be sure to happen to you whether you go alone or in company."

"Nonsense, my dear."

"All right; if you can stand it I can."

"There's no danger of his drowning, Angie."

"Why not?"

"Because he is too big and fat to sink."

This produced a laugh, and the subject dropped. Shorty had loaned his yacht to some friends, and he was going to fish from the wharf, expecting the Old Man would do the same thing.

Indeed, he did go down and take a look.

"No good," said he.

"Who says so?"

"An old boss fisherman," he replied, proudly.

"Old boss plowman, you mean."

"No; I understand the habits of the striped bass, and I'll show that I do."

"Say, bet yer a ten we catch the first fish," said the Kid, throwing his hook.

"All right. Anything to make it interesting."

"Where are you going to fish?"

"Up here, nearer the shore."

"All right. I'll make it another ten that you don't catch arry fish."

"All right."

And he started up the wharf.

The tide was just flood, and the Old Man got into a flat-bottomed boat belonging to a clam-hunter, and, going to the stern, he threw out his hook and waited the luck of a fisherman.

Shorty and the Kid took in the situation. The boat was only held by a rotten old cord tied to a stone, and already it was becoming taut as the ebb tide drew it along.

The Kid stole softly down and cut this cord without being observed, and then went back to where Shorty had just landed a bass.

The Old Man was quite as enthusiastic at fishing as at anything else, and he failed to notice that he was adrift and that there were no oars in the boat, the clam hunter having taken the precaution to hide them.

Indeed, there was nothing at all in the boat but a few broken clams and a big fish horn and the Old Man's basket.

Slowly he floated past the end of the dock where Shorty and the Kid were fishing, and even yet he didn't tumble.

"Soy, where yer goin'?" called the Kid.

The old victim looked around, dazed for a moment, and then he tumbled.

"Confound it, there's no oars in the boat."

"You'll be arrested for stealing that boat."

"Oh, pshaw! Get another boat and come and get me."

"No boats here. Never mind, if you don't get run down you'll be rescued. Ta, ta!"

"You rascals!" and he read them a lesson on ingratitude until the tide bore him almost out of hearing, while Shorty and the Kid were guying him in all sorts of ways.

He was nearly a mile from the shore and utterly helpless, but seeing the old fish horn, he seized it and blew a blast for assistance until his eyes stuck out like a frog's.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"Toot-toot-toot!" the Old Man sent out of the battered fish horn, calling for help while drifting yet further away with the tide.

Then he would use his next pull of breath to say cuss words with.

Shorty and the Kid laughed until they could not stand, and the three kids came running down to see what it was all about and also joined in the general whoop.

Finally Shorty and the Kid borrowed a sail-boat and started to the rescue, seeing which, the Old Man ceased his trumpeting and sat dejectedly down in the stern of the boat to wait.

"Oh, confound the luck," said he. "Why did I not take my wife's advice and stay at home? She was right, and I might have known that something or other would happen to me. And now the laugh will be on me again. Oh, I wish I were dead or locked up in a lunatic asylum. How in thunder did the boat get adrift, I wonder? And those rascals to laugh at me instead of procuring a boat and coming to my rescue. And after all I have caught nary a fish and lose two ten-dollar bets, with those villains. Oh, oh, woe is me!"

"Boat ahoy!" from Shorty broke his train of thought.

"Hello!" he answered, savagely.

"What's the matter?"

"Adrift without oars."

"Want a tow?"

"Of course I do."

"Pay for it?"

"Yes."

"All right. Stand by to catch a line," said Shorty, as he guided the sail-boat around the scow, while the Kid stood ready to heave a line.

The Old Man managed to catch it.

"Make it fast to something."

"Nothing here to fasten to."

"Tie it ter yer leg," said the Kid.

"Sit on it, then."

The Old Man did so, and then took a turn around one of his fat legs for further surety.

"Soy, yer a healthy ole fisherman, arn't yer?" asked the Kid, while Shorty was getting into the wind.

"How many striped bass yer got, dad?" asked Shorty, as the tow began.

"Oh, you go to thunder, both of you!" he growled, for he didn't want to talk.

They had the wind full on the port quarter now, and the sail-boat began to hum through the water, causing that old fishing scow to throw up buckets full of water, which were drenching the Old Man, just as Shorty intended they should, and he began to kick.

"Hold on!" roared the Old Man.

"What's the matter now?"

"You are drowning me. Stop her!"

"Can't do it. Hold fast."

"Hold thunder!" he growled, and just then, in trying to avoid the spray, he got up from the rope and it came within an inch of slipping away from him.

But he caught it just in time, and taking a turn around his wrist, he held on like grim death and yelled like a stuck pig:

"Stop her, I say!"

"How am I going to make the boat go slower than the wind blows?" demanded Shorty, while both he and the Kid were nearly bursting with laughter at the Old Man's plight.

But he was as wet as he could be, and was obliged to hang on or get left with his boat half full of water.

But finally they landed him just where the owner of the boat was waiting for it, and having waited some time, was beginning to get wrathful.

"What yer been doin' with my boat?"

"Oh, Lord, don't ask me," groaned the Old Man, as he swept the salt-water from his eyes. "I was standing in her stern fishing, when she somehow got adrift without my knowing 'till after it was too late. There were no oars, and I was helpless until they came to the rescue and towed me ashore."

"But she's half full of water," protested the fisherman, laying down the few fish he had not sold, and tipping her over to empty her.

"The speed of the tow sent it over the square bows."

"But where is my fish-horn?"

"Isn't it there?"

"No, sir."

"That's funny. Must have fallen overboard," mused the Old Man.

"Yes, and has most likely fallen to the bottom before this time," replied the fisherman.

"Very likely."

"New fish-horns cost money. That one cost me a quarter of a dollar."

"Oh, that's all right; I'll fix that," said he, and he tried to get his hand into his wet pocket.

But it was no go.

"Charley, lend me half a dollar," said he.

"Haven't got a cent with me."

"George, have you?"

"Nary."

"Well, say, come up to the house with me, and bring along all the fish you have got. I'll buy them and a new horn besides."

"All right, sir," and he followed him.

What a circus it was for the two jokers and those three hilarious kids.

And what a circus awaited him at home.

But that Long Island fisherman was smart enough to understand that he had fallen on a good thing, and like his kind, he was inclined to make the most of it.

He sold his fish for twice as much as he had been asking other people, and he got the price of a new tin horn besides.

What the racket was he couldn't understand. He only suspected that a huge joke had been played on the Old Man, and this sort of satisfied him for getting the best of him himself.

But after he had gone Josiah Burwick stood in the presence of the three wives, and he wished he was at the bottom of the well.

They looked him all over and then broke out into a hearty laugh, which Shorty and the others reinforced by coming up just then.

"Oh, of course. No little thing can happen a person in this place that everybody don't laugh," said he, disgustedly, only to create more laughing.

"What did I tell you, Josiah Burwick?" asked his wife, looking at him severely.

"What?"

"Didn't I tell you not to go—that something would be sure to happen to you if you did—and hasn't there?"

"Well, who'd ever have thought of that old boat going adrift?"

"Who'd ever thought of a person's getting into it when there was a full grown wharf right handy by? But you always want to do things differently from anybody else, to the extent that it is a wonder that you are alive to-day. Are those the fish you caught?" she asked, pointing to the purchase.

"Y—yas—ah—"

"They look as though they hadn't seen water in at least two days. But what were you paying the man for?"

"For—for a horn I lost, and for bringing up the fish in his basket."

"But what about the basket you carried away with you?" she demanded.

The Old Man was suddenly struck again. He had lost that basket overboard!

Another laugh at his expense, and it did seem as though Ginger would drop the top of his head over on his shoulders.

"Did you dive for those fish?" she asked returning again to the charge.

"Certainly not. Why?"

"Well, you look as though you had been overboard as many times as you have got fish," and this was good for another laugh.

"That is the fault of those rascally boys, who towed me ashore so fast that it made the boat throw water over me."

"Indeed! Where is your hat?"

He put his hand on his bald head, for he had never thought of his hat before.

"That is gone, eh?"

"Well—I say, any of you see my hat?" he asked, turning to the jokers and kids.

"Yes, papa, I saw it," said little Cal.

"Where, my son?"

"Way out in the water, sailing with the tide."

"Yes, that's gone. Well, how about your fishing tackle?" she then asked.

"Oh, thunder!" he exclaimed, and then he remembered that it must have gone overboard with the basket.

His heart nearly collapsed, but he was in for it and braced the best he could.

"I—I guess I must have left it somewhere," said he, trying to let himself down softly.

"Yes, you left it out in about a hundred feet of

water. Very profitable fishing. Now, how about your clothes?" she added, looking at him.

"Eh—my clothes?" he asked, and then turned slowly around.

That was a signal for another laugh, for until then nobody had noticed that the Old Man's new flannel suit in getting wet had shrunk until it was more than skin tight.

"Yes, your clothes. How do you ever expect to get out of them?"

"What! Won't they come out again?"

"Never!"

"Never mind, dad, the buttons will begin to fly pretty soon," suggested Shorty.

"If it keeps on growing shorter much longer, it will be about right for Cal," suggested the Kid's wife.

"Well, now, don't you think you are an old plum, Josiah Burwick?" asked his wife, once more going for him.

"But I assure you it was all an accident."

"Oh, yes, but these accidents are always happening to you. Whatever you attempt to do you invariably get the worst of. Now you have admitted this to me and promised that you would refrain. But the moment you hear anybody talk about fishing, it puts you on your old metal, and nothing will do but you must go and show them how to catch striped bass. I told you not to go, and that something would be sure to happen to you. Well, was I not right?"

"Well, but—"

"There are to be no buts about it in the future, Josiah Burwick," she said, severely.

"Eh? What do you mean?"

"That you have either got to settle down and behave yourself like a grandfather, and engage in no more of these doings, or I will have you sent to a lunatic asylum."

"What?" exclaimed the Old Man, aghast, almost, at such a decree.

"I mean it. Now go up-stairs and see if you can get out of your clothes."

The Old Man knew who the boss was around there when she put her foot down, and so he didn't hesitate.

So far as her threat to send him to a lunatic asylum was concerned, he couldn't blame her at all. Indeed, he had concluded long ago that it was the best place for him.

So he went up to their chamber for the purpose of peeling off his shrunken clothes.

But the task was too much for him. He may as well have tried to unbutton his skin and get out of it.

So he called for Shorty to assist him, and both he and the Kid, shrewdly suspecting that he would have to do so, were waiting and promptly on hand.

"What's der matter, pop?" asked the Kid.

"Been fishing, haven't you?" asked Shorty.

"Oh, you know all about it. I want you to help me off with these clothes," said he.

As he spoke he was a comical sight to behold, and, in spite of his evident misery, the two jokers had to indulge in a laugh before they could do anything else.

In trying to get his coat off he had hunched it up on the shoulders until the tails of it did not reach to the waistband of his trousers, and the way it was now it was utterly impossible to get it off in one piece.

They tugged at it honestly for quite awhile, but it stuck to him.

"Have to cut it, dad," said Shorty.

"Well, cut it, confound the thing! A man ought to be hung that will make such cloth as this. Cut it."

Shorty took his knife, and commencing at the middle seam at the collar, he began to cut the stitches, and presently he had the coat in two pieces.

Then they managed, by turning the sleeves wrong side out as they pulled upon either half, to peel it from him after the style of skinning eels.

"Well, get down on the lounge and let us finish skinning you."

The Old Man did as ordered, and Shorty, with a six-inch grin on his fat mug, proceeded to rip the seam and give his daddy relief.

After doing this, he and the Kid began to strip each leg off just as they would have skinned an eel or a black fish, finally succeeding in getting them off in two pieces, leaving him in nothing but his underclothes.

"There you are."

"Many thanks. Whew! who ever saw such goods before?"

"Oh, this house cloth; dry goods that won't stand wet."

"I should say so. Guess a good-sized dew would shrink 'em."

such and as your parent. If you must play tricks, play them on somebody younger. Take Ginger, for instance."

Ginger was adorning the dining-room table, but he overheard the last remark, and rolled his big eyes in their direction.

"Better not fool any mo' wid me, else dar'll be a funeral at somebody's house. Ise had all dat monkey business I wants," he muttered to himself.

"All right. I hold up my hands for keeps."

"Me, too, for keeps."

"Well, see that you stick to it. And not only that,

but if you ever find him forgetting himself, as he is liable to do, you know, just warn him to desist, instead of urging him on by your various insinuating ways."

"Well, if I don't do it, Angie, you may stab me with a rusty nail," said Shorty.

"But mum's the word, though, for if they catch us at it, look out for snakes."

"All right; let her go!" and the three young rascals went off by themselves to work up a job on their beloved dads.

CHAPTER XXV.

DURING the next few days things were remarkably quiet around the Long Island homestead.

Shorty and the Kid went on a visit to New York; the Old Man paid attention to his crops, some of which were being harvested, while the three kids went roaming over the country, or varied that with fishing.

The wives actually began to take hope, and to conclude that everybody would have a rest in the future.



The song and dance commenced, and it was a right lively one in every way, for it was more severe than the first one.

"Cert. If there's anything due ther tailors they'll shrink," said the Kid.

"Yes. I knew a suit to get clear away from a chap once because they weren't paid for," added Shorty.

"That's all right. You go down now and let me take a bath and get on some dry clothes."

"Done?" asked Shorty, as he started to go.

The Old Man nodded seriously.

"Yellar last?" asked the Kid.

He held up both hands.

"Well, don't let it get untied," said Shorty, as they left him alone.

The Old Man drew a sigh of relief. He was dead in earnest about swearing off all his smart business, and from that time forth he resolved on being an old man.

Of course there was a lot of laughter down-stairs when Shorty told them how they had to get his clothes off, but they said they believed he was in downright earnest about trying to be a young or a funny man again.

"But in most instances he would be all right if it wasn't for you fellows," said the Old Man's wife seriously. "You know it is a fact that ever since we have known you, and goodness knows how long before, you have been playing all sorts of pranks on him. You have scarcely given him a week's rest, and now we all think it about time to stop. Remember your own sons, and think what they might make your lives when you get to be old men. They know too much already."

"That's so, Angie. I plead guilty," said Shorty, and in dead earnest.

"Me, too," added the Kid.

"Let him alone. He is an old man. Treat him as

"An' me, too, wid a bologna sausage."

"Let us see if we can't turn over a new leaf in the book domestic."

"Angie, you ought to be a president's sister. But there's my hand on it; I'll let up."

"Me, too, an' dere's my little puppy."

And so the matter was honestly settled, and both Shorty and the Kid were genuinely in earnest. They came to the conclusion that they had had fun enough with the Old Man, and that this was a good place to stop and give him the remainder of his life to rest in, and get what enjoyment he could out of the doings of others.

"No more monkeying with the Old Man, eh?" mused Peter Pad.

"No, it's death agreed upon that the first one that disturbs him will be sent to the House of Refuge," said Cal.

"What a shame!" mused Pete.

"Why?"

"Look at that," said Pete, taking a big cannon cracker from his pocket.

"Oh, well, we've got Ginger left."

"Yes, and—hush!" said Ed.

"What is it?"

"There's our own dads."

"That's so," replied Ed. "You hit it."

"Sauce for the goose. See?"

"Sauce for the gander. We will honestly give the Old Man a show and just deal in a little sauce."

"Bully!"

"We'll have some fun before vacation is over, see if we don't."

Ginger, however, had his big eye open, for he had heard it suggested that the jokers transfer their attention from the Old Man to him.

But the kids were never so well-behaved in their lives, and even the neighbors, who had learned to dread them, wondered what had come over them to make them three such sweet, well-behaved boys.

They were sorely tempted, however, for the Old Man went out on the lawn every noon and took a nap in the hammock, and the thought of what they might do, but dare not, made it a great burden for them to hear.

But they knew their mothers suspected them and were continually watching them, so they were good of necessity.

One of their pranks, however, came to the light about this time.

It will be remembered that they succeeded in stealing a henhawk's nest, although it was attended with considerable danger.

And it will be remembered also that they put two of the hawk eggs under a hen that had been set that day by the Old Man on some eggs of a new breed that he obtained of one of his neighbors.

But the young rascals forgot all about it, boy like, and so the brood came out, with the two chicken hawks as good as the best of them.

The Old Man did not examine them closely. He simply noticed that two or three of them were smaller than the others, but that was nothing strange.

And so the old hen with her big brood was put in a lathe coop and the chicks allowed to run as usual.

Things went all right for about a week, when the chickens began to disappear.

There were eighteen at first, but now there remained only ten.

"I do believe there is a chicken hawk around here somewhere," said he.

"Well, they escape the dreadful fate of being spring chickens," said Shorty.

"Yes, but I'd like to know what it means. Come out and see them."

Shorty followed his dad out to the coop, and there a sight met their gaze.

Those chicken hawks were making a meal of one of the chickens, tearing it limb from limb with great voracity.

Both the Old Man and Shorty stopped and gazed at the unnatural demonstration.

"What in thunder—" and Shorty was worsted.

"Well, by the great horn spoon!"

"That accounts for your missing chickens, dad. But what in thunder are they?"

"Two legged devils, I should think."

Shorty stooped down and picked one of them up, but it fought him savagely.

"Whoa, you terrier!" cried Shorty, as the little villain nipped his finger.

The Old Man picked up the other one, but it clung to the half-devoured carcass of the chicken with whom it had been hatched.

"Well, this does take the cake," said he.

"Cake! I should say it got away with the young and unsuspecting chicken."

"But what do you make of 'em?"

Shorty held his around the neck and took a careful look at it.

"Why, it isn't a chicken at all!" said he.

"Well, I should say not; but what the dickens is it?" demanded the Old Man.

"Well, I should say they are young chicken hawks," said Shorty.

"Chicken hawks! Goodness me!"

"Yes; look at their hooked bills, the little rascals, and see their claws; why, of course, they are nothing else but chicken hawks."

"But how came they among the brood of chickens, that's what I'd like to know?"

"Well, that is rather a robust conundrum, dad. But perhaps some old hawk hadn't time to hatch her own eggs, and so put them under the old hen, seeing she was in the business."

"What nonsense!"

"Well, perhaps the hawk hatched them and was too busy to bring them up, and so brought them over here where she knew they would be well taken care of and have a plenty to eat."

"Do talk sense, George."

"Well, what do you say?"

"I say they were hatched with the brood, but whether the eggs were placed under the hen by design or accidentally got mixed up with the other eggs is the question."

Just then the three kids came along.

"What is it, papa?" asked Cal.

"A pair of young chicken-hawks that have been eating up the little chickens."

"Oh, them's our chicken-hawks!" exclaimed Pete, rushing up, eagerly.

"Yours!" exclaimed both Shorty and the Old Man, starting and glaring at them.

"Yes; we robbed a hawk's nest and put the eggs under the old hen."

Shorty laughed, but if the Old Man had been given to profane language he would undoubtedly have made the atmosphere sulphurous.

"You imps of darkness; you flends about house, who put that deviltry into your heads?" he finally roared, at the same time dashing down the chick he held and killing it.

"All three of you deserve the gad, and you, Pete, for one will get it," said Shorty, at the same time giving his chick a nip on the neck that broke it.

"What harm was it?" asked Ed.

"What harm, you little rascal, what harm? Why, they have eaten up nearly the whole brood of chickens, and I have a lath in the barn for you, Master Cal," said the Old Man.

The Kid came down to see what all the excitement was about, and was told all about it. He wanted to laugh dreadfully, but Shorty and the Old Man's looks restrained him, and when they led away their respective kids for punishment, the Kid took Ed by the hand, saying there should be no partiality shown, and in less than five minutes there were three well-whipped kids.

Talk about your "three little maids from school," you should have seen those three little kids after their dads got through with them on that occasion.

All three of those fathers had taken a heroic tumble, as had their mothers, and it was agreed that while they swore off their mischief must be strictly attended to, to keep them from following what was evidently such a natural path to them.

They all realized that they had begun quite too late, but were bound to do their best.

So it was a picture to see the Old Man snatch his son Cal. Shorty savagely escorting Pete toward the place of chastisement, followed by the Kid looking severe instead of comical.

All three of them walked out on the lawn after their matinee, tears standing in their eyes and indignation in their hearts.

During the three weeks of incubation they had forgotten all about the hawk's eggs, for they continually had so much mischief on hand that any particular piece was soon forgotten.

They all three sat down on a lawn settee and remained silent for some time, while their parents took the dead chicken hawks to the house and explained the situation.

There was a comical side to it of course, and neither

of the six parents could help laughing at the absurdity of the thing, but at the same time they all adhered to the agreement they had entered into respecting the vigorous treatment that must be applied.

"They have seen too much, and it will be a hard task to root the mischief out of them," said Shorty's wife.

"Well, they'll see no more," said Shorty.

The kids sat there until their sniffing died away without speaking.

Peter was the first to break the silence.

"I wish I was back in New York," said he.

"So do I," added Cal.

"Me, too," chimed Ed, sadly.

"There's no more fun here."

"No. The idea of walloping us just because those young hawks got the best of the chickens."

"Yes, an' we'd forgotten all about them. I was going to put 'em in a cage and have some fun with 'em, but they killed 'em just to be ugly. It's real mean," said Pete.

"No, there's no more fun to be had here if we've got to catch it for every little thing that happens. I'm sick of it."

"So be I, and I shall be glad when it comes time to go back to New York."

"Oh, that's the place."

"You bet."

"No dies on that village."

"But it was sorter comical, as well as tragical, that those chicks should come out and at once proceed to eat up their mates," and they all indulged in a quiet laugh, taking care that they were not heard at the house.

"But, oh, wan't all three of 'em mad?"

"Well, I should say so!"

"Never saw my dad mad before in all my life," said Ed.

All three of them rubbed the seat of their trousers reflectively.

"Well, there's one thing sure pop," said Pete.

"What is that?" the other two asked.

"We have got to lay very low if we want any more fun, and remain awfully good for ever so long."

They reflected silently over the proposition until Ginger rang the supper bell.

It was a very quiet meal, the kids keeping their eyes fixed on their plates, and scarcely a word was spoken.

But Ginger was foolish enough to wear a grin which the kids knew the meaning of only too well, and each evolved his own thoughts.

They retired uncommonly early that night, closely observed by their parents.

"That is their first lesson—when will they be in order for the second?" asked the Old Man.

"Very soon after they have done smarting, you can bet on that," replied Shorty.

"Well, they must have it, no matter which of them is personally at fault, for they always work together."

"Bad eggs," mused the Kid.

As for the wives their sympathies were with their boys, but at the same time they said nothing, knowing that heroic treatment was the only thing to be applied with success.

Everything was exceedingly quiet about the place, and Shorty and the Kid went off to shoot quails.

This left the kids more freedom, although they found no approving smiles in their mothers' faces. Everybody looked savage at them.

Everybody but Ginger, who wore his tantalizing grin, and took every opportunity of displaying it.

The kids couldn't stand this, and so they put up a little job on him.

He had an old lawn chair out behind the arbor, where he retired after his day's work was done, to smoke a very black pipe and indulge in meditation.

On the seat of this little Cal placed a vigorous carpet-tack, and then they all went into supper and for inspection by their watchful parents, who were anxious to know whether they had been good boys or not during the day.

They looked as honest as lambs, although they had little or nothing to say. They were waiting for that tack to get in its fine work.

And those parents knew them so well that they didn't indulge in the domestic and social felicity of asking them how good or how bad they had been, and so said nothing.

This rather broke the kids up, for they were used to the other sort of treatment, and so they took up some picture-books and pretended to get very much interested.

In about five minutes from that time the neighborhood was startled by a whoop that would have done honor to a Comanche Indian.

It came from Ginger, who had adjusted himself earnestly on the point of that carpet-tack.

The Old Man and everybody else leaped to their feet in alarm.

"What was that?"

"Somebody murdered, I guess," suggested Shorty's wife, while the expression that came over the faces of those kids was conclusive that they knew the meaning of the yell.

The three parents rushed out of doors, and there saw Ginger with a terrible look on his black face, and just in the act of pulling out that murderous tack.

"What's the matter, Ginge?"

"Somebody hit you?"

"Oh, Lord, look at dat!" he moaned, holding up the offending young nail.

"What is it?" asked the Old Man.

"It am a big carpet-tack, sah, dat somebody put in my cheer, an' I runned it clean inter me, sah," replied Ginger.

"That settles it," said Shorty, and all three of them went back to the sitting room.

"Come," said he, taking Peter by the arm.

"Come," said the Old Man, seizing Cal.

"Come, my son," said the Kid, catching the astonished Ed by the collar.

"Where?"

"Out for a little seance."

All three of those kids whined and protested their innocence of anything wrong.

"No matter; one of you did it, and all three will suffer the same," said the Old Man.

Then the song and dance commenced, and it was a right lively one in every way, for it was more severe than the first one.

"Now, get to bed," said the stern parents, and they stood not upon the order of their going but got up and skipped at once.

It was balm of Gilead to Ginger's wound, and after rubbing it awhile and feeling to make sure there was no more, a smile actually stole over his face as he resumed his seat.

Those parents, sternly proud in having done their duty, calmly talked the matter over, and came still more fully to the conclusion that they were pursuing the right course of treatment.

The mothers regretted it, but admitted that it was the only way of breaking them of their pranks.

"Oh, they have been up to these things for a long time," said the Old Man, and he proceeded to tell them of various snaps that had been played on him, and which he had afterwards traced to them.

But those boys!

Those three kids!

Those belabored urchins!

Each sought his lonely bed.

Each wiped away the tears on his lonely towel, and each wondered if he had been kicked by a mule or struck by lightning.

Where, oh, where was the laugh they had anticipated over that trick?

Turned to a whimper and sodden sighs.

What did it mean, the two innocent ones asked themselves, that they should get as much punishment as the guilty one?

Why was it that all their dads seemed to be united against them? Were they determined that they should have no more fun?

They went to sleep trying to solve this perplexing conundrum, and at the same time each of them had still in for Ginger.

The old black fool!

What business had he to yell so, and then give the snap away?

They were up bright and early the next morning, and each took particular pains to shake his fist at Ginger, who met them with a grin.

"How you like you fun last night?" he asked.

"That's all right, you old coon," said Pete.

"Guess you won't come foolin' roun' me any mo' honey."

But they took no further notice of him, and went out on the lawn where the dogs were waiting for a romp.

But they weren't feeling much like having a romp, and so they waved the dogs aside, and sat reflectively down upon their favorite lawn settee and began to talk over the all important matter.

Ed was the first to speak.

"Say, what's the use of living?"

"Give it up," said Cal.

"But what do you make of it?"

"What?"

"Why, the way our dads are going for us."

"It's some sort of a put-up job."

"What for?"

"Oh, ever since they all agreed to go light on the Old Man they seem bound to break up everybody's fun."

"Yes, and they don't show any partiality either. We all get it just the same," said Pete.

"Yes, we both got licked on your account," moaned Ed.

"And did you get on to that coon's grin?"</

bushes so as to be able to appear at the right moment as though coming directly from the woods, and of course innocent.

Unfortunately that turkey was not hungry, and their dads arrived just as she concluded to swallow it.

Then there was such a squawking, and Ginger and the Old Man rushed to the coop, followed by Shorty and the Kid, all anxious to learn the trouble.

Ginger saw it, and got into the coop to get out the tormenting fish-hook. But in this he had much trouble, for the old gobbler objected, and gave him a severe fight, although he finally succeeded in extracting the fish-hook.

Those indignant parents looked around. The kids were nowhere to be seen. But they were where they could hear, and concluding after a while that the trouble was all over, they ventured home, each proudly swinging his bag of chestnuts.

"Well, if they do we must keep up the medicine," said Shorty.

"If they get in any of their fine work there it will make things more lively than it would here," mused the Kid.

"I'll tell you what it is, boys; if we find we cannot break them with the whip we must adopt entirely a new way of living," said the Old Man.

"What do you mean?" they both asked.

"Well, it is something wife and I have talked over for some time. Three such little rascals should not live under one roof. Each makes the other worse, whereas if they lived in separate houses, a good distance apart, allowed to meet only at long intervals, and then only for a short time, there would not be so much mischief, and it would be ever so much easier for us to manage them."

"That's so, dad," mused Shorty.

knew that he had the parents on his side, and they would get the worst of it.

Well, finally they all got back to New York again, and no one seemed unhappy at it. The kids certainly did not, for during the next few days they were taking all in anew, and romping over Central Park like lads returning from a vacation.

In a few days the New York house was running again as usual, and a stranger would hardly suspect that it had been closed four months and more.

And the kids were behaving so well, all things considered, that the parents were happy in the belief that their young ones had taken a permanent tumble to themselves, and they did not watch them so closely as they otherwise would.

True, they used to have considerable fun down in the kitchen, but it was so quiet that they made no complaint so that it would reach their parents, al-



The Old Man and his wife stood at the top of the stoop, while the wives and kids of the two others came down to the carriages. "I say, young fellows, if you care anything about each other you had better shake hands, for it may be a long time before you meet again," said Shorty.

Those parents were there.

"Come!" said each in turn, and once more did those Shorty Kids dance the dance of repentance.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"THREE times and out!"

That was what ran through the heads of those kids after they had received their third flogging for baiting the Thanksgiving turkey.

Not the honest look, not the appearance of having just returned from chestnutting could save them. They caught the usual dose.

There was one consolation, however, that the next day was Thanksgiving, and after that they were to return to New York.

The country didn't seem to agree with them—that is to say, it hadn't of late.

Exceeding quiet followed during the next few days, and the kids worked like beavers in helping their mothers pack trunks and boxes for transportation to New York.

As each of them felt then, they never cared to see the blooming old country home again, being fully convinced that New York was just about the right size for them.

Those three reformed dads felt exceedingly proud of what they had done in weeding the mischief out of their boys, each one agreeing in the belief that they were pretty thoroughly cured.

"They may take it up again when we get home," said the Old Man, thoughtfully.

"Dead sure," murmured the Kid.

"But how could we work it if it came to that?" asked Shorty, thoughtfully.

"Easily enough. We all three own the New York house, although the deed is in my name. You put twenty thousand apiece into it. I will simply buy you out, and you give me a quit claim deed. That's all there is about it, and you can each of you buy houses of the first order in different parts of Manhattan Island, or in the annexed district, with the money, and find even more convenience than you do here, living in flats."

"Are yer tryin' ter shake us, pop?"

"Not at all. I am only speaking for the best of all concerned."

"But they may be thoroughly cured," said Shorty.

"Nothing would please me more than to be sure of it, my sons. But you must remember that they are three chips of three tough old blocks, and we do not know what may happen."

"Well, I'm agreed to it, if we can't wallop the monkey business out of them," said Shorty.

"Me, too," put in the Kid, for both he and his wife had talked the subject over frequently, and she approved of it.

And so the most sensible thing they could do was finally agreed upon, although it was with the understanding, of course, that the kids forgot their lessons and got to playing high jinks again.

But the boys were too earnestly at work helping pack for home to think of mischief now, although they still had it in for Ginger for future payment.

Ginger understood their feelings toward him, but he

thought Ginger was evidently itching for them to commit some overt act so he could report them.

It was fun for the servants, after their work was done, to gather around the kitchen range and listen to the comicalities of the three kids, and they in turn liked to amuse them—at least, all but Ginger.

"Say, Mary, didn't know that Ginger was a high jumper, did you?" asked Pete one night.

"Faith, I didn't think he cud jump over a peck measure wid those feet," said the bright chamber girl.

"You better slow down wid you nonsense," muttered Ginger, frowning.

"Oh, yes, he is the boss high jumper."

"How's that?"

"Well, he can sit down on a chair, and if there's a big carpet tack in it, point up, he can jump five feet," said Pete.

"Yes, you ought to have seen him do it down in the country," said Cal.

"And heard him yell!"

"Oh, mighty smart, arn't yer? Why don't yer go on an' tell de hull story? You oughter seen three boys jumping and yelling jus' 'bout free minits arterward," and then Ginger opened his head for a laugh. It was a good one.

"What was it?" asked the servants.

"Oh, our dads were mean enough to flog us for having a little fun with a coon," said Ed.

"Faith, that's too bad entoile," said Mary, and all the servants agreed with her, greatly to the disgust of Ginger, who regarded himself as the king of the kitchen.

"I wants ter keep a good ways way from you, fo'

you's bad. I wants you ter keep out ob de kitchen all de time," replied Ginger.

"Oh, if we come it won't be to see you."

"But I won't hab you heah at all."

"Well, bet yer life we shall come whenever we take a notion—eh, lads?"

"Well, as first speaker, I should exclaim, 'You bet!'"

"It's a cold day when we get left, Ginge."

"Bully for yees, b'ys! Come when ye loike," said the servants.

"Who's boss heah?"

"Mrs. George Burwick," said Mary, promptly.

"But I's next."

"No, you are not."

"How dat?"

"Next comes Mrs. Josiah."

"Guess not, honey."

"Then comes Mrs. Charles. Now where are you?"

"I tell you I's de butter, an' nobody can boss me," he still protested.

They all guyed him until bedtime, and glad enough he was to escape them.

And after he had gone the kids kept the company laughing by relating the fun they had had in the country, and especially all the rackets they had worked on Ginger.

And they parted that evening with a promise to give them another nig't's entertainment in the near future.

The city schools were already open, but their parents couldn't make up their minds what to do with them, as it was very doubtful if they would be taken back into the district school out of which they had once been fired, and so the parents spent much of their time on the subject.

One thing was well understood, however, and that was that it would not do for them to go together to any one private school, for they had already wrecked two or three of them.

It was a solemn subject with them, and yet they could not arrive at a conclusion that seemed just the thing.

Meanwhile the neighbors had bemoaned the return of the kids, and heartily wished that somebody would give them poisoned candy.

But they did not see much of them for the first week or two, for they were roaming all over the city like gypsies, but they knew that the evil day was close upon them.

One day while prowling around they saw the open doors of a ten-pin alley, with people enjoying the healthful game, and, of course, their interest was excited, and they walked in.

They had often heard their fathers speak of it, but this was the first time they had ever seen it.

They watched the players for nearly an hour, and doubtless would have remained longer had not the manager of the place run them out as being altogether too young.

On their way home they debated the question of buying a quarter size set for home, concluding that they could use the upper hall for an alley to very good advantage.

So they stopped at a toy store on Broadway and bought an elegant set of balls and pins.

The dealer was to send them the next morning, and the boys spent the better portion of the evening in speculating upon the sport they'd have.

And the next morning the box did come, greatly to the interest of the parents.

"What have you got there?" asked the Old Man.

"A set of baby ten-pins, papa," replied Cal.

"Baby ten-pins! Let's look at them."

The box was easily unhooked, and, sure enough, there was as fine a set of toy ten-pins as they had ever seen.

"But where are you going to use them?"

"In the top hallway, we thought. We will be very careful, and the carpet on the floor will prevent the balls making a noise."

"Yes, but you must have a guard in front of the hall window, and also some pieces of carpet to put down for the balls to strike against."

"I'll help them fix it up, for I am right glad to see them take to such innocent amusements," said the truly good Old Man.

Indeed, they all thought so well of the scheme that they spent half of the day helping them fit up a noiseless bowling-alley and showing them how to play the game.

Of course it was a trifle boyish, and after seeing

them operating it all right they withdrew and allowed the kids to have it all their own way.

Their mothers went up and saw them enjoying their innocent game, agreeing with their husbands that it was just the thing to amuse and keep them out of mischief.

And so the thing went on for three or four days, and the boys talked of nothing at the table but "strikes," "spares" and "ten-strikes" and who was the boss.

But of course the novelty of the thing soon wore off, as it generally does with boys, and then they only gave it a part of their time, except on rainy days.

One day young Peter Pad (I'll murder you, Shorty, for naming that kid after me), while rummaging around in the store-room, found one of the large rockets that had been left over at the Fourth of July celebration in the country.

And of course a brilliant idea struck him. He always got hit with an idea whenever there was the slightest foundation for anything of the kind.

He showed it to the others, and they suggested keeping it until night and firing it off.

But, oh, dear no, not for Peter, dear, dear, no. He had an idea worth a dozen of that, and he cautiously proceeded to explain it to them.

It was a rainy day and they had become tired of ten-pins, but Pete's suggestion made them dance with delight.

They went right to work to carry it out.

The pins were set up in regular order and the alley cleared.

A heavy box was placed where they stood when delivering the balls, and against this the stick end of the rocket was placed, while the rocket itself lay upon the floor, pointing straight for the ten-pins.

"Now look out for a ten-strike that is a ten-strike," said Pete, taking a match from his pocket and again sighting the rocket.

"Let her go!" said Cal.

Pete, nowise loath, struck the match, applied it to the fuse, and then all three of them beat a hasty retreat out of harm's way.

That rocket started with a roar like a steamboat blowing off steam.

It was a good rocket—a lively rocket.

But before the boys could recover their senses it had exploded, and not only made a "ten-strike," but had driven outward every pane of glass in the window, blown open the door of Ginger's room, and set it on fire—set the wood-work on fire—at which the rascals, never dreaming of such a thing, fled down-stairs shouting fire.

That was a ten-strike indeed.

And so loud had the explosion been that the whole household was alarmed.

The family, servants and all rushed up-stairs wildly.

"What has happened?" they all asked, as they met the kids coming down-stairs, looking as though they had seen a ghost.

"Something has bust!" said Ed.

"Where?"

"On the top floor."

By this time Shorty had got near enough to smell the powder. But before he could give any orders a line of firemen came rushing up the stairs with hose, meaning business. The explosion and smoke had been seen by a fire patrol and they had a stream of water on the blaze in no time. But Ginger's bed and things were badly soaked.

As for the kids, they watched the engine play for a few moments, and then skipped for cover, dreading the wrath to come.

After the firemen had put out the flames and soaked everything they could get at by kicking in the doors of the servants' rooms, they dragged their hose down-stairs.

The crowd, in the meantime, had grown rapidly, and it is safe to say that nine out of ten were disgusted because the fire was such an insignificant affair.

The engineers went through the building to make sure that all was right.

Shorty and Ginger were viewing the damage done, when Shorty picked up the remains of the rocket.

"What is this?"

"Fo' de Lord! Wait a minit," and he ran to the store-room where he had placed it high up on some hooks.

"Dat am de rocket dat was left ober down in de country Fof ob July, an' I brought it heah, thinking

you might want it, an' put it high up on dem hooks."

"That settles it. Those rascals fired that rocket at the ten-pins and created all this trouble," said Shorty, going down-stairs with the ruins, while Ginger went to look after the ruins of his room.

All of the parents were gathered in the sitting-room, and the servants were sweeping out the muss, the fireman had made.

Shorty held up the exploded and broken rocket.

"How?" asked the Kid.

"What is that, George?"

"The cause of all the trouble."

"Explain."

"It was a rocket left over last Fourth by accident, and Ginger brought it home and put it upon some high hooks in the store-room. Well, it appears that those three daises of ours got tired of rolling balls to knock down the pins, and so shot this rocket at them."

"Well, hang me if that arn't original," said the Kid.

"Original! Original way of setting a house on fire," growled the Old Man.

"It was dreadful," the wives said.

"I should say so. But 'his settles it."

"How?"

"What we were talking about—breaking up."

"Yes, I should say it did," added his wife.

"There is no such thing as reforming the rascals so long as they herd together, and this settles the question. We must separate at once and go so far apart that they can get no trace of each other, and then the gad must not be spared. I positively will not stand it any longer," said the Old Man, now red hot.

"Nor I," said his wife, and the others had little or nothing to say, although it was plain that they agreed with the others.

"To-morrow we will fix this business and the separation must take place at once."

And so they all retired to their respective apartments to talk the matter over, it being understood that the Old Man was to retain the homestead and the others locate where they liked.

Those kids came home long after dinner, and sneaked into the kitchen, where Ginger was at work.

"Hist!" said Pete. "Say, Ginge, did she burn much?"

"You wait 'til you parents reach for you an' you find out how it burn. Dar am no mistake about it, you is de wus boys dat eber libed!"

"Oh, you are down on us, Ginge. But say, did it burn much?" asked Pete.

"Burn! Bust out all de glass in de hall window, got into my room an' burn up de bed an' my good clus, and de fireman shoot all de glass."

"That's it. Those firemen always destroy more than they save," said Pete, indignantly.

"Well, say, got any grub left?" asked Cal.

"You don't deserve nuffin', an' maybe you parents get mad at me," replied Ginger, who was glad enough to keep them there in hopes their dads would go for them there.

So he set out some cold chicken and other good things, upon which the hungry rascals fell as only hungry boys can.

"Say, Ginge, were the dads much mad?" asked Cal.

"Oh, you jus' wait. Dar'll be gore runnin' down you backs, fo' shuh."

"Oh, well, I can stand a little gore," said Ed; but at the same time he was the first to sneak up-stairs to bed.

Greatly to Ginger's disgust, there was no whaling done that night, and the only way he could account for it was that the dads had weakened.

It was nearly noon the next day when two large express wagons, loaded with trunks, stood in front of the house, but soon moved away to give place to two smart carriages.

Those kids knew nothing at all of what was going on, but so long as there was a ride, all right.

The Old Man and his wife stood at the top of the stoop, while the wives and kids of the two others came down to the carriages.

"I say, young fellows, if you care anything about each other you had better shake hands, for it may be a long time before you meet again," said Shorty.

"All right. Give us your flippers," said Peter, and brazenly they stood there hand in hand. "It will be a cold day when the Shorty kids get lost, eh?"

"You bet," and Shorty and the Kid took them by the collars and flung them into the waiting carriages.

[THE END.]

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